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VOLUME 2

RETRO

MICRO GAMES ACTION

THE ULTIMATE RETRO COMPANION FROM games™



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THE 8-BIT COMPUTERS BATTLE IT OUT

THE TOP 100 RETRO GAMES OF ALL TIME

AS VOTED FOR BY THE READERS OF GAMES™

IN ASSOCIATION WITH CAPCOM

RETRO MICRO GAMES ACTION VOLUME 2 THE ULTIMATE RETRO COMPANION FROM games™

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INSERT COIN

When games™'s retro section was first revealed, foolish cynics suggested that there were only a finite number of subjects that could be discussed and that the section would soon run its course. Yet here we are nearly 50 issues later, and if anything, the section is stronger than it has ever been.And in part, this is mainly due to a shift in how retro gaming is now perceived. When I first started on games™, the average retro gamer was generally considered to be a social outcast who was approaching (or past) his forties and still living at home with his parents. Not only is this outrageous statement utterly false, thanks to companies like Capcom, Midway, Namco and Sega with their excellent compilations, retro gaming is now being opened up to a brand new generation of gamers.

While it's a long way away from being as commercial as traditional games, platforms such as the DS and PSP, various Plug 'N Play packs and even mobile phones are slowly cottoning on to the fact that there's a hungry crowd out there who covet classic retro treasures like zombies lust brains. With Nintendo's Wii promising exciting possibilities for the retro gaming market and Sony's PSP and Microsoft's Xbox Live Arcade enabling even more classics to be downloaded, the interest in retro gaming is only going to continue growing. So here it is, the second Volume of the very best from games™'s retro section. I hope you have as much fun reading it, as I've had putting it together.

Enjoy!



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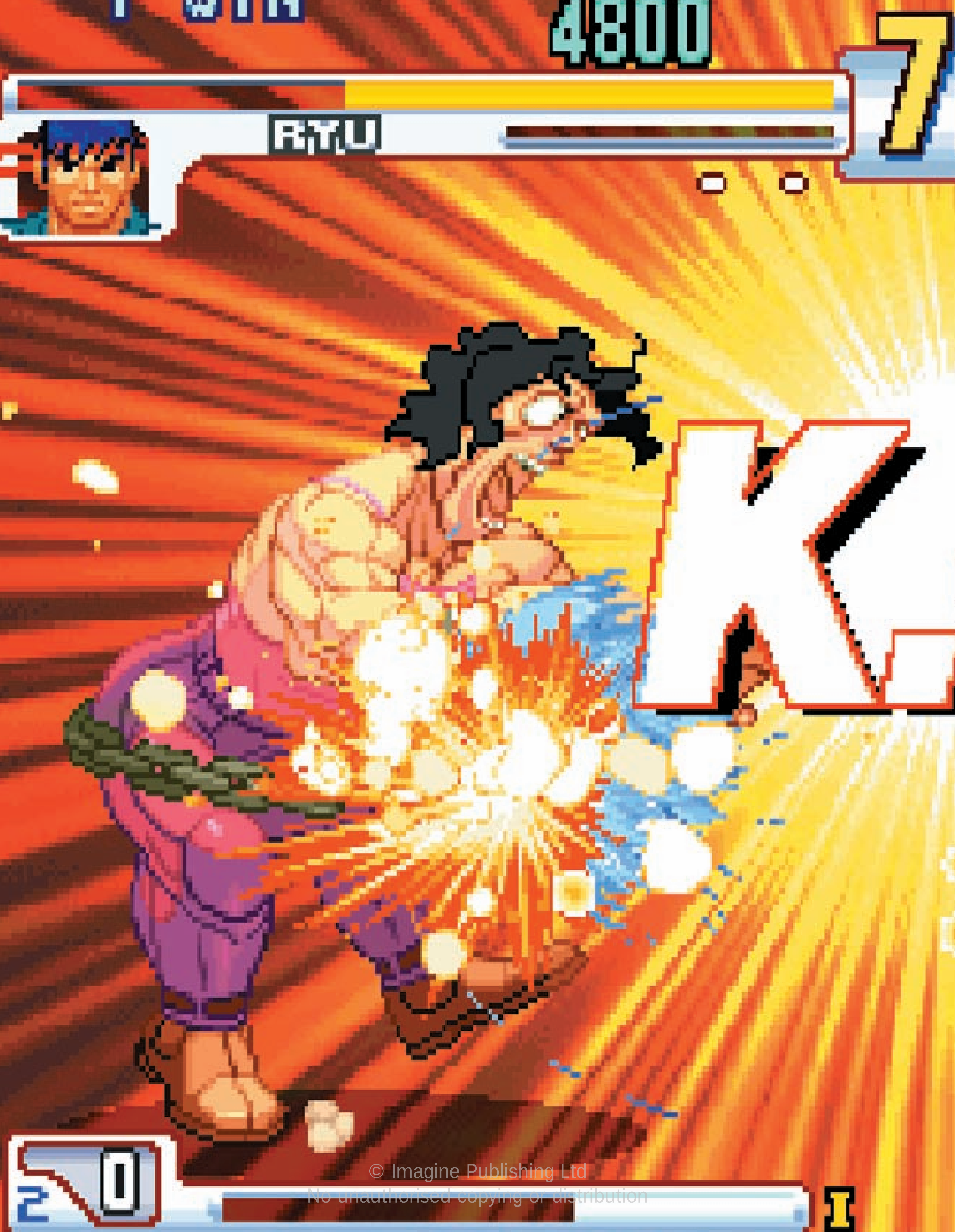
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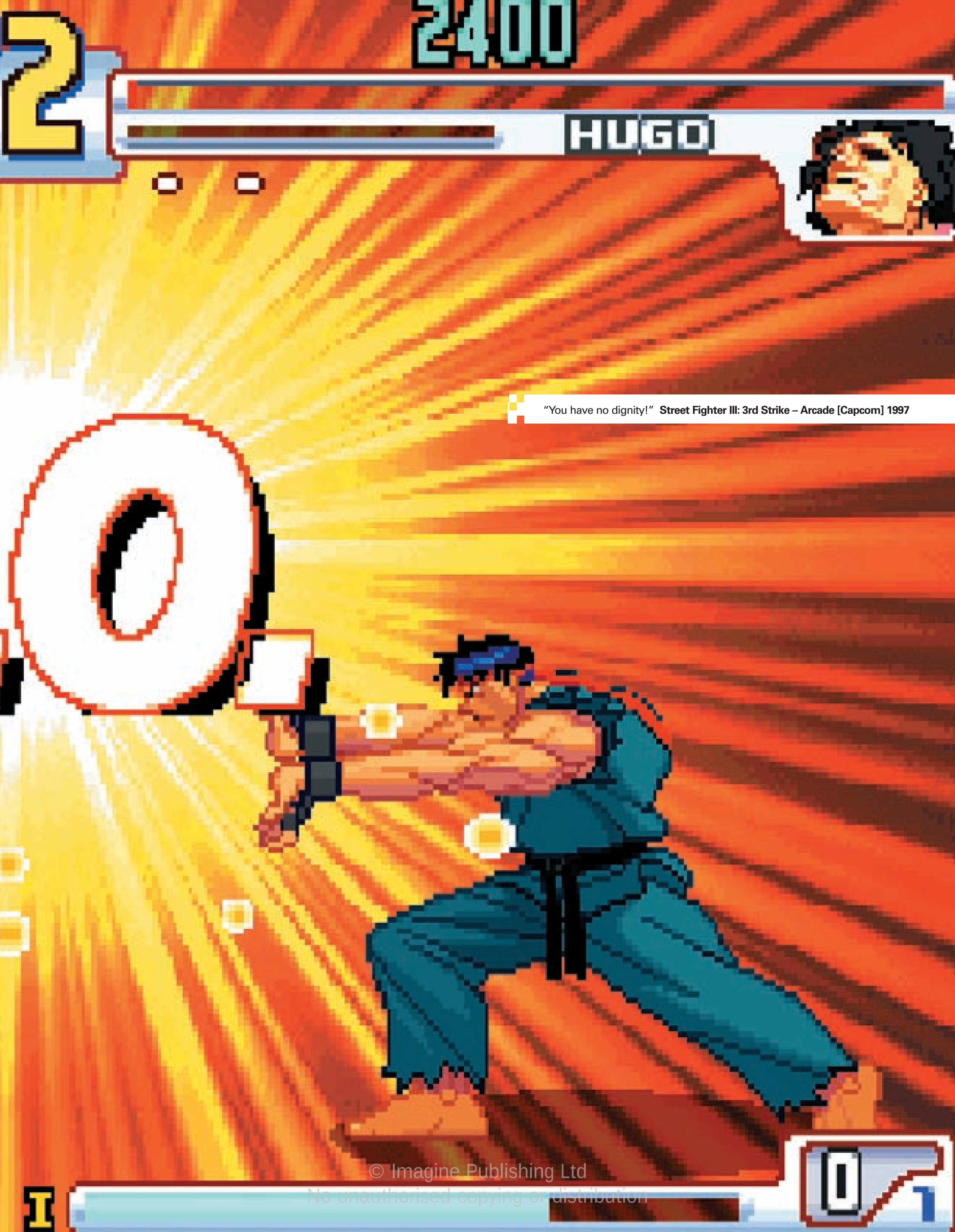
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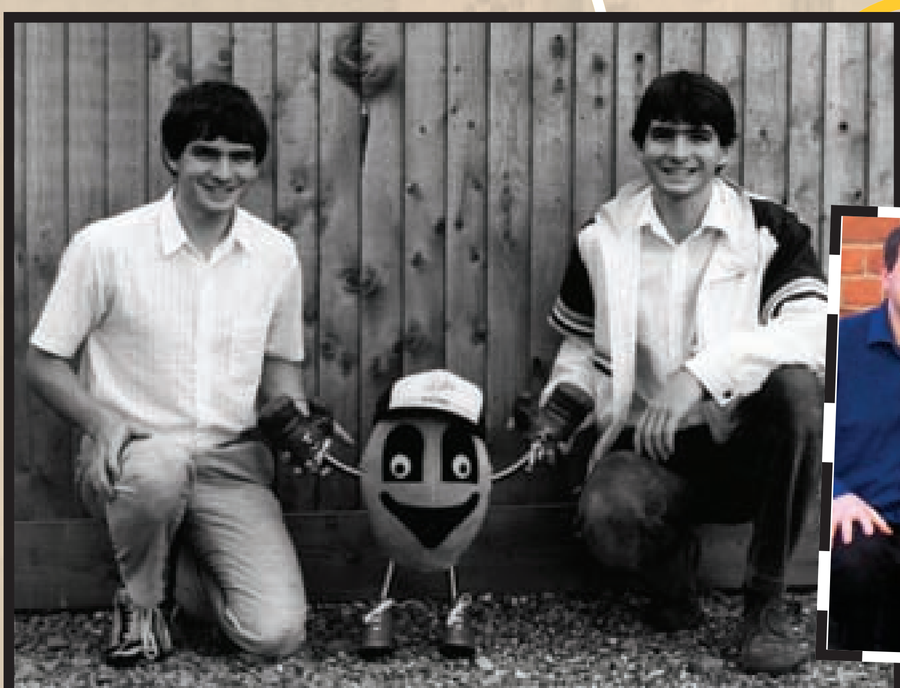


"You have no dignity!" **Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike – Arcade [Capcom] 1997**



THE ORIGINAL GOOD EGG

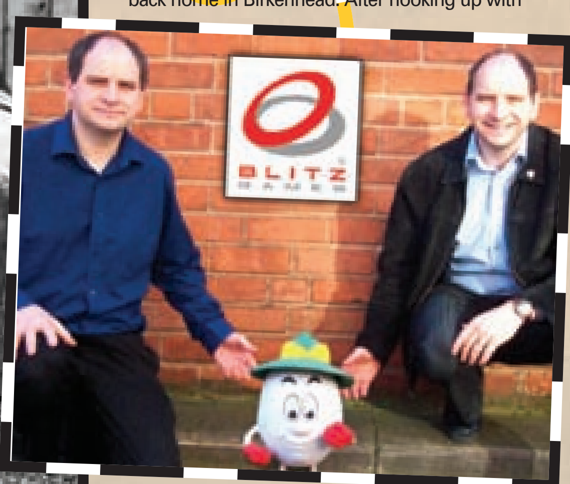
Since he somersaulted onto our screens in 1987, Dizzy has retained a loyal fan base and starred in many popular games. The intrepid egg had a variety of adventures and arcade games that saw him visiting Magicland, getting stranded on Treasure Island and even trying his gloves at white water rafting. Retro looks back at Dizzy's illustrious past and learns all about him from his creators, Philip and Andrew Oliver.



▲ The youthful Oliver twins with a frankly terrifying early incarnation of Dizzy. Now, that's Philip on the left, no, Andrew, no, wait…

It was the summer of 1980 when 12-year-old twins Andrew and Philip Oliver had their first brush with videogames. Holidaying in Cornwall the two brothers were exploring a local arcade and were lost in a cacophony of alien yet comforting sounds. Pushing their way past several fruit machines and Penny Falls the brothers found themselves in front of a *Pac-Man* cabinet. "We were standing there looking at this amazing machine when a guy came along, put some money into the machine and offered to let us play it," recalls Philip. "He obviously realised how keen we were to play it and we really enjoyed it. If only we'd had more money to waste on games…"

Despite the twins' lack of cash they found ingenious ways to continue their new-found interest back home in Birkenhead. After hooking up with



▲ Today's Oliver twins with a suitably modernised and less child-scaring Dizzy. That's Andrew on the left, no, Philip, no, hang on…

▼ The screen that launched a thousand scratched heads and puzzled expressions…



one of their friends whose dad happened to own an Apple 2E they were soon playing the likes of *Pinball*, *Monsters* and, of course, *Pac-Man* for as long as humanly possible. A year later the brothers had progressed to the ZX81, which took pride of place under the family TV. While the machine belonged to their older brother, the twins got to keep it for themselves most of the time ("he never really used it as he'd just discovered girls," explains Philip). Totally absorbed by the machine, Philip and Andrew were soon working on their own variants of *Pong*.

But while the ZX81 proved to be a capable starting block the twins realised that they'd need something more powerful. "We quickly decided that we needed something with more memory and colour, so in 1982 we saved up and purchased a Dragon 32," begins Philip. "Six months after that we once again upgraded and bought a BBC Model B, the computer we eventually ended up releasing our first tiles on."

The Oliver twins' first success came with a humble home-made program entitled *Strategy*. The twins had entered their game in a competition on the BBC's *The Saturday Show* and ended up winning first prize. Acornsoft, a leading publisher at the time, re-named the game *Gambit* and released it commercially. Spurred on by their success the brothers threw themselves into their new hobby. "Getting published really encouraged us to work every hour that was possible, which, admittedly, got completely in the way of our school work," recalls Andrew. "Luckily, we were always well received by publishers because we'd had a game already published, even though it probably only sold around 50 copies."

The boys had arrived and a chance encounter with fellow developer siblings the Darling brothers at the 1985 ECTS show marked the start of a relationship that would continue for another eight years. "They [Richard and David Darling] had had great success by writing games for Mastertronic, but now wanted to go it alone," says Andrew. "They had a small stand at the show to promote their new company, Codemasters, and what impressed us was that the directors were programmers themselves who understood what it took to write a game. Anyway, Codemasters was impressed by our games and asked us to work on *Super Robin Hood*. When they estimated royalties at around £10,000 it became something we couldn't turn down."

ENTER THE HERO

With just one computer to share between them the twins were programming for 23 hours a day, allowing themselves two half-hour breaks in order for the machine to cool down. Sharing gruelling 18-hour shifts, the brothers took turns, with one coding on paper while the other used the computer. The heavy workload paid off, though, as *Super Robin Hood* became their first number-one hit. While the brothers initially used an Amstrad, Codemasters soon sent them a Spectrum and asked them to ▶

"GETTING PUBLISHED ENCOURAGED US TO WORK ALL HOURS – WHICH GOT IN THE WAY OF OUR SCHOOL WORK"



BIGGEST FANS EVER?

Have you met Dizzy's remarkable followers?

While Dizzy's adventures drew to a close a long time ago, they still carry on in an unofficial capacity. Head on over to the excellent www.yolkfolk.com and as well as finding one of the greatest dedicated shrines to Dizzy, you'll also find an impressive amount of fan-created games.

Like the official games they range from sprawling adventures to quirky puzzle titles and clearly show just how much admiration the Oliver twins' creation has gathered. While the brothers are well aware of both the site and the games, they don't get to dedicate as much time to them as they'd like.

"It's very complimentary that fans have gone out there and tried to create their own Dizzy games and we feel honoured by that," says Philip. "Unfortunately, there simply aren't enough hours in the day to go and play them all and give feedback. While there are some great Dizzy sites available, we're particularly impressed with yolkfolk.com. There are a lot of updates, it tries to be a portal to other sites and is not derogatory to other Dizzy fans."



THE ORIGINAL GOOD EGG

start converting games for it. Before long, *Ghost Hunters* and *Grand Prix Simulator* followed (the latter saw Codemasters receive a legal notice from Activision due to its similarities to Atari's *Super Sprint*) and went straight to the top of the charts.

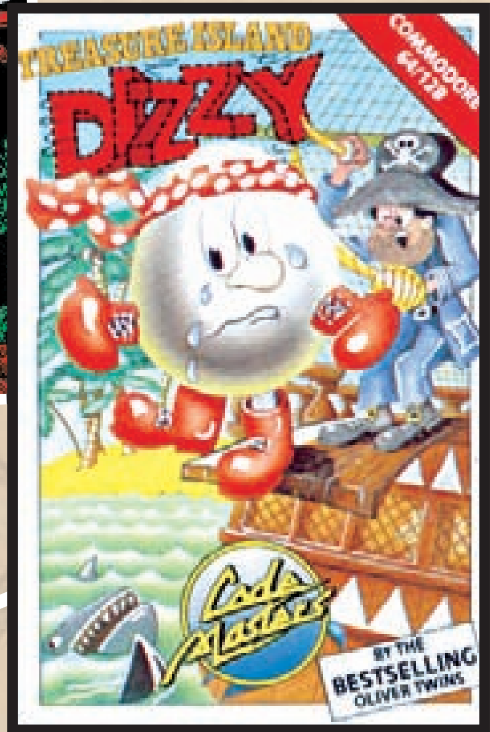
Keen to return to the formula that had served them well in *Super Robin Hood*, but annoyed with Robin's lack of identity (they only had a 3x3-pixel grid to create his face) they began to experiment…

"One morning we were just playing around with how big we could get a face on screen, but that obviously meant not giving it a body," explains Philip. "We ended up drawing the biggest face we could and simply added arms and legs to it so it actually held together and you could run it around the screen. It only took a morning to complete all the animations but it's still something I vividly remember." Now they had their character up and running – well, cartwheeling, really, as it was easier than animating walking on their new graphics package – and named (Dizzy) it was simply a case of deciding what sort of game *Dizzy* would be.

"With *Dizzy* we wanted to create an interactive cartoon, so we needed other characters and it needed to be an interesting world," says Philip. "We realised that if we used references from classic stories such as fairy tales we could create a compelling and original world that would also be familiar in some way for the player. We also wanted to use these ideas in a way that would create some more unusual gameplay elements instead of the standard 'find key to open door' type of dynamic."



▲ *Treasure Island Dizzy* was a massive hit on the back of the first game's rave reviews and word of mouth.



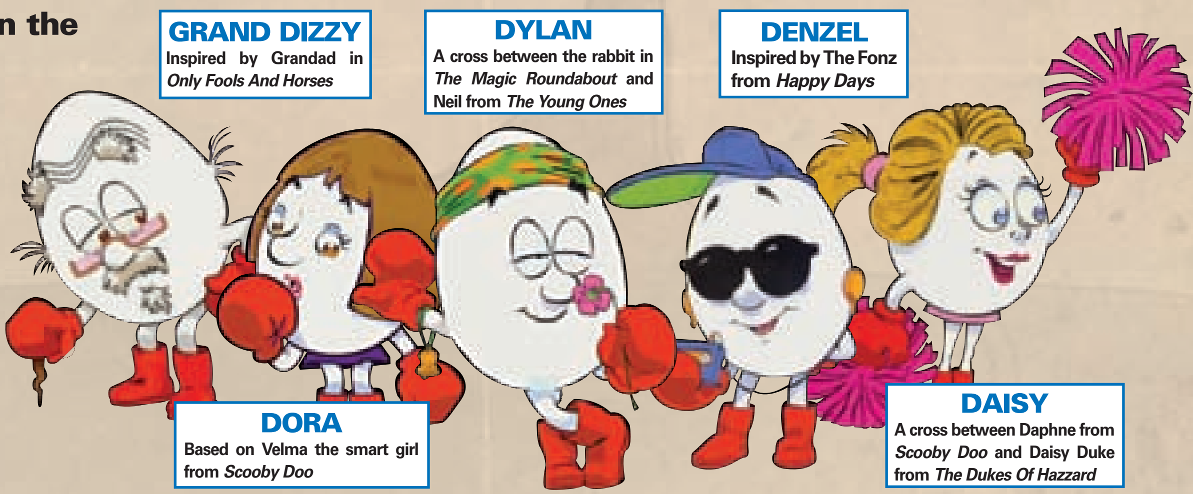
After two months of hard graft *Dizzy* was finished and ready to be thrust on an unsuspecting public. While the brothers felt that *Dizzy* was a great achievement, it didn't enjoy the success that Andrew and Philip expected. In part, Philip felt that this was down to a lack of familiarity with the subject matter. "People knew the premise of *Robin Hood*," he says. "They knew the premise, they knew Robin Hood; it was one of those free licences that everyone knows about. With *Dizzy*, though, nobody was quite sure what it was so sales were quite slow, but the feedback was incredibly positive and we received an awful lot of fan letters from Codemasters." As a result the twins did something that would be practically impossible in today's market – they created a sequel not because of the incredible sales, but because it was what the fans wanted.

Treasure Island Dizzy was completed in less than a month and released 14 months after the original game. Whereas *Dizzy* took around six months to reach the magic 100,000 units sales mark *Treasure Island Dizzy* achieved and exceeded the same figure in a matter of weeks and, predictably, went straight to number one. Unsurprisingly, the brothers have their own theory as to why the Island-based sequel became so popular so quickly. "We believe that everyone who had bought the first *Dizzy* game liked it so much that the minute they saw another one, they went straight down the shops to buy it," muses Andrew. "As a result of this huge surge, it went straight to number one and those people who

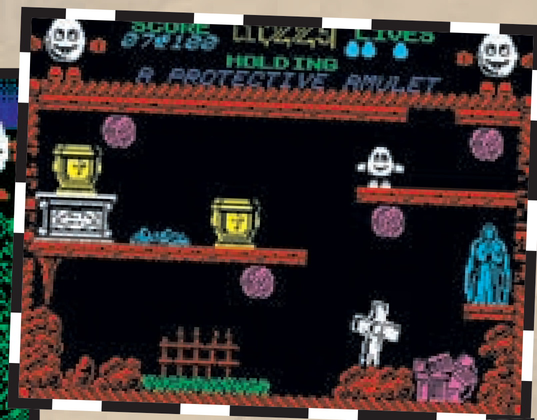
MEET THE FAMILY…

The Yolk Folk in the Olivers' words

We'd already introduced enemies and wanted to introduce some friendly characters to the series," explains Philip when asked about the arrival of Dizzy's friends in *Fantasy World Dizzy*. "One of the original inspirations was the Smurfs, as they had their little village and family and friends, so we wanted to create something very similar. We decided a diverse spread of characters was needed, so we came up with the following…"









▲ Various members of Dizzy's family debuted in *Fantasy World Dizzy* to offer our hero some advice on his epic(ish) quest.

hadn't learnt of *Dizzy* saw it was at the top of the charts and purchased it on that recommendation."

DIZZY BRANCHES OUT

It was November 1987 and with the twins' friends having packed their bags and left for university, the brothers found themselves at a loose end. When the Darlings jokingly suggested that the brothers should make another *Dizzy* game in time for Christmas as it would sell at least 100,000 copies, the Olivers took them up on their offer.

"We realised how long it took to write an adventure game, and thought we wouldn't be able to get that out in time," recalls Philip. "However, we were still avid fans of *Pac-Man* and used to joke how that game must have been written really quickly. We spent a whole weekend working on a simple, fun maze-based game that would make the projected release date. By Monday morning (and having had no sleep all weekend) we were practically finished. A graphics artist improved the graphics a little and we got a musician to do some sound effects for us. *Fast Food* was pretty much completed by the end of the week."

Although *Fast Food* managed to debut in time for Christmas it never sold as well as the previous adventure titles. The brothers attribute this to the game's quick turnaround time and admit that it lacks the creativity of the adventure games. However, they had no problems releasing similar puzzle games and knew that Dizzy was the reason for their success. "Once you've got something as successful as *Dizzy* and a huge, ever-growing fan base it became obvious that we could sell twice as many copies of any cool new game idea if Dizzy was in it," admits Philip. "By including him in most of our new games it just helped make them all the more successful."

Knowing that the next Dizzy game would need to be another adventure, the brothers took a break by working on the likes of *Grand Prix Simulator 2*, charity title *The Race Against Time* and *Jet Bike Simulator* (the first of Codemasters' slightly more expensive Plus range). By the autumn of 1988 the brothers were ready to start work on *Fantasy World Dizzy* and introduced a selection of new characters called the Yolk Folk.

Despite their name, however, they and Dizzy aren't actually eggs – or so the twins claim. "He's simply the largest face we could actually move around a screen," says Andrew. "We were trying to show real expression in the character so that people were engaged by him; needless to say, we felt the face was important." Regardless of what they actually were, the introduction of the Yolk Folk proved a masterstroke by the twins and gave the franchise a depth that had been missing from previous titles. Dizzy could now interact more with non-player characters and they added a new dimension to the ever-growing series.

Perhaps the most notable thing about *Fantasy World Dizzy*, though, is that it became a success before anyone at Codemasters had even seen it. "Back in those days, Codemasters was only an operation of about six people – most of those were Darling family members – and we weren't local to them, so as a result we tended to just write what we wanted to write and posted it in," begins Philip. "It's quite interesting that *Fantasy World Dizzy* was actually fully duplicated, on sale and a number-one seller before anybody at Codemasters had actually loaded the tape up to see what it was. There was such a high level of trust between us and the Darlings that this wasn't uncommon, and we were all working 18-hour days anyway so it's quite likely that no-one had found the time to load it up!"

> **"WITH THE DIZZY GAMES WE WANTED TO CREATE AN INTERACTIVE CARTOON"**

Codemasters had nothing to worry about as *Fantasy World Dizzy* was a great improvement on its predecessors and proved a massive hit with reviewers and fans. After working on *Ghostbusters II* for Activision and *Operation Gunship* for Codemasters, the brothers decided it was time for another Dizzy game and came up with the excellent *Kwik Snax*, a superb puzzler that remains Dizzy's best venture outside of his traditional adventure titles.

CALLING IN THE CONTRACTORS

With new consoles coming onto the market, Codemasters was eager to break into the lucrative US NES market (at the time, the system had over 20 million sales compared to 1 million for the Spectrum) and quickly had the brothers get a

THE ORIGINAL GOOD EGG



A WELL-ROUNDED EGG?

There's been a three-dimensional demo, but will we ever see a 3D Dizzy?

In this age of tarting up old games for new consoles, we asked the Oliver twins about the possibility of Dizzy making a fully fledged 3D comeback. A three-dimensional Dizzy has already appeared in a teaser trailer on www.fantasticdizzy.com, but Philip Oliver is quick to point out that it doesn't necessarily mean there's a new game in the works. "The fans were really excited, thinking it was an actual game already in development, but we only wanted to see what people thought of the idea," he says.

While some Dizzy followers have embraced the new, rounded Dizzy, we'll admit to being rather more sceptical. That said, Philip admits that if the series is resurrected – which would most likely happen on the Game Boy Advance – three dimensions may be the way to go. "All the characters from that retro period have made the transition to 3D and we always thought Dizzy would be no different if he was to return," he says. "It gives you so much more scope for the gameplay and the environments."

So is this 3D adventure ever likely to happen? "Never say never," says Philip enigmatically…

conversion of *Treasure Island Dizzy* ready to show off at the 1990 CES trade show. After the demo received great interest, Codemasters decided to release new versions of *Fantasy World Dizzy* and *Grand Prix Simulator*. However, it also wanted to keep releasing titles for the home computers, so after some deliberation the twins decided to contract out *Magicland Dizzy* to Big Red Software so they could continue work on the new NES titles.

"There simply weren't enough hours in the day for us to write all the games we wanted to," says Andrew. "We were very friendly with Big Red Software (who, incidentally, we now employ most of) and had a lot of respect for the work that they were doing on their games. Between us we worked out a rough storyline and were very happy with the game that they produced. They then worked on *Dizzy Prince Of The Yolk Folk* which they designed almost entirely on their own and we were exceptionally pleased because it really captured the full essence of what *Dizzy* was trying to achieve. In some ways it did this better than our own games had done up to that point."

The Big Red Software titles proved popular and the studio went on to develop the substandard *Panic Dizzy!* and the excellent *Seymour* titles that have more than a few *Dizzy* similarities. Last but by no means least was the decent but flawed (it was much too big) *Spellbound Dizzy*, but despite its problems it proved one of the most successful *Dizzy* titles and was a fitting end to Big Red Software's partnership with the twins.

While the home computer versions of Dizzy were proving immensely popular the twins were finding working on the NES (and later the Master System, Mega Drive and Game Gear) a completely different proposition… "The transition to consoles was hugely difficult for us," admits Philip. "We had been producing games incredibly quickly but as we moved onto console we were now up against games like *Mario* and, later, *Sonic The Hedgehog*. This meant that games took an awful lot longer to produce, the quality of the graphics had to be higher and overnight we found the games were taking ten times as long to write. On consoles people wanted more on-screen movement and faster action rather than actual thinking. This is one of the reasons why the first *Sonic* was so hugely successful as [Sonic Team] tapped into fast action-based gameplay. Obviously, Dizzy was not well suited to this and that was probably why the *Dizzy* games finally declined in popularity – people wanted more action games."

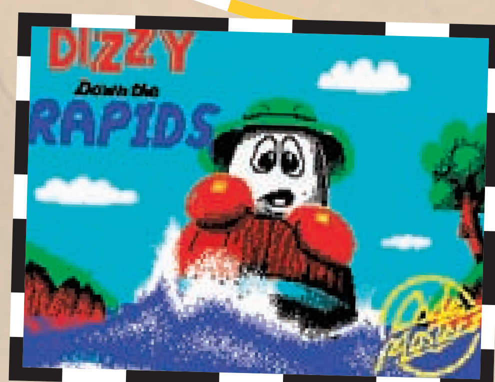
While *The Fantastic Adventures Of Dizzy* did prove popular, it never achieved the sort of sales that the twins had hoped for. They predicted the game would sell over half a million units but the figure was nearer to 125,000. In part this could have been due to the fact that an ongoing legal battle with Nintendo and Codemasters over the Game Genie meant that the game missed the lucrative Christmas holidays and ended up getting released the following April. Dizzy was starting to wane in popularity, but for the fans, the biggest insult had yet to arrive…

A NEW BEGINNING?

Dizzy was slowly starting to run out of steam, and while his games continued to sell they no longer automatically reached the coveted number-one spot This wasn't due to complacency by the twins or Big Red Software, gamers simply seemed to be growing less excited by Dizzy's continuing adventures and arcade games. *Dizzy Down The Rapids* (which started life as a mini-game in *The Fantastic Adventures Of Dizzy*) was a typical example and impressed few critics or gamers. *Bubble Dizzy* also divided audiences and even its unique conception wasn't enough to save it. "We got the idea of *Bubble Dizzy* from just watching the bubbles in a lemonade glass and sitting there thinking about how they would go up and then burst, only to be taken over by another one," reveals Andrew. "We thought we could make that idea into some interesting gameplay. We were also inspired by the excellent C64 title *Nebulus* and wanted to create something similar but with a different angle."

With Christmas approaching, Codemasters decided that it wanted another Dizzy game for the home market. Though *Spellbound Dizzy* had proved popular, Codemasters wasn't happy with the price it was sold for and intended to change it for Dizzy's next outing. "Codemasters was concerned that there was relatively little profit compared with how successful *Spellbound Dizzy* had been," explains Philip. "Unfortunately, the jump from £2.99 to £10.99 was huge, mainly because there were no mid-price points available. As a result it had to be more polished, higher quality and produced in a large box and supported by a good marketing campaign. It was not unusual for games of this quality to go out at £9.99; therefore, we saw no adverse reaction to it. I think up until then, the Dizzy fan base had been very pleased with what value for money they were receiving on the previous games. By the time we got to *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy*, they just accepted that we were now the same price as everyone else."

Despite the brothers' claims, *Crystal Kingdom*



"THERE SIMPLY WEREN'T ENOUGH HOURS IN THE DAY FOR US TO WRITE ALL THE GAMES WE WANTED TO"



▲ You can't go far wrong with the *Dizzy Collection* if you've still got an Amiga lying around – three awsome adventures and a couple of puzzlers.

Dizzy didn't prove that popular with fans, and they saw through the cheap extras that Codemasters had bundled with the game in order to justify the much higher price.

By this point, the strain was beginning to show between the twins and Codemasters and their final few games hit several problems. The brothers decided to port several of the NES titles over to Sega's Game Gear and Master System as they would be fairly easy and cost effective to convert. As production continued the twins' relationship with Codemasters soured and they decided to cancel *Dreamworld Pogie* (one of the planned titles) when several staff left and the Olivers were unable to replace them.

Work continued but faced further problems when Codemasters' marketing department explained that none of the titles would receive separate releases. With little choice in the matter, the brothers bundled the remaining planned games (*Wonderland Dizzy*, *Go! Dizzy Go!* and *Dizzy The Adventurer*) onto one compilation. But even this proved problematic as Codemasters stated that it didn't want two adventure titles on the new compilation. *Wonderland Dizzy* was dropped and the brothers quickly converted *Panic Dizzy!* to replace it. With the twins losing staff and being forced to live off their wives' earnings they decided to break away from Codemasters and form their own company.

CUTTING-EGG GAMES

Sadly, the production of future *Dizzy* games on later consoles and computers no longer proved to be financially viable (a big difference to when *Treasure Island Dizzy* was made), and with Codemasters and the twins both owning a fifty-fifty share on the Dizzy IP no more games were released. Fortunately, this may change in the future, although as Philip points out, it's going to need to be a very good game.

"We do have discussions with Codemasters every now and then about resurrecting Dizzy, and we've even done a few art tests in recent years [take a look at www.fantasticdizzy.co.uk], but neither company wants to revive him just for the sake of it. Both companies have established good reputations for creating a huge variety of great new games that are arguably better than Dizzy ever was, so if he were ever to make another appearance it would have to be something really special."

Despite having no firm plans for Dizzy's future, the twins are more than happy with the support he continues to get. "The demand to bring Dizzy back continues to be very gratifying and we know from the many emails we receive and the people that apply to work for us that Dizzy inspired a lot of people to get into the games industry," confirms Andrew. "With Dizzy, though, you have to realise that there's a big difference between people's fond childhood memories and the quality of top-selling character games today. If he came back he would have to compete with the likes of *Jak And Daxter* and *Ratchet & Clank* – and those types of games require big budgets and many months of development. If there's a publisher willing to commit to that kind of investment, though, then they can definitely count us in. There's also been a lot of interest in people wanting to play the original Dizzy games on some of the handheld formats recently so maybe he'll make a new appearance on mobile phones. We'll have to wait and see."

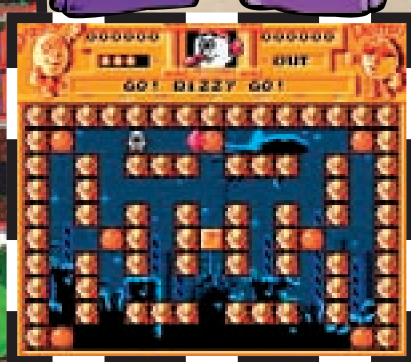
If Dizzy does ever return, the brothers know exactly what type of game he would appear in and have already envisaged his next adventure. "We feel that the *Shrek* movies completely captured the personality, storyline and imagery we had always dreamt of but were unable to achieve with the technology at the time," reveals Philip. "If we ever get to make a new Dizzy game, that's exactly the sort of direction that we'd like to take him in."

For the moment, though, the twins are simply happy that Dizzy continues to exist in gamers' hearts and are pleased with the success that he's achieved. "We think – and we may be wrong – that it's because Dizzy conjured up a great deal of imagination in people's minds that was very unusual at the time," says Philip. "Clearly with the technology that we had we were only scratching the surface to tell the story and introduce the characters, but people's imaginations were sparked and they were able to fill in the gaps, a little bit like the way people read an awful lot more into books, and the imagery that they conjure up in their minds is often far more impressive than when Hollywood makes a movie of that same book."

Regardless of whether Dizzy returns or not, it's obvious that both the Oliver twins and his legions of fans still have a lot of love for the exploring egg and will continue to support him in the future.







▲ *Go! Dizzy Go!* was one of several puzzle-based Dizzy titles, none of which surpassed his adventure games.

DIZZY FAMILY TREE

He may not have appeared in a game for over 12 years, but Dizzy's popularity is showing no signs of abating. Originally created by the Oliver Twins in 1987, Dizzy quickly built up a cult following and became one of the most well-known videogame characters on the 8-bit computers (he's appeared in more Spectrum games than any other character). As his games grew in popularity, Dizzy left his adventuring roots in order to appear in a variety of arcade-style games (which were often nowhere near as good as his original adventures) and quickly moved over to the more powerful 16-bit computers. Just when it looked like Dizzy would successfully cross over to the more lucrative console market, a falling out between the Oliver Twins and publisher Codemasters meant that several games were never finished and Dizzy's fabulous adventures came to an abrupt end.

DIZZY



- 1986
- 8-bit computers
- This is where it all started. Ambitiously dubbed 'The Ultimate Cartoon Adventure', the original *Dizzy* laid some ambitious groundwork for future games to build upon. Puzzles were never too taxing, the game itself nipped along at a fair old pace and Dizzy himself looked wonderfully endearing (considering the limitations of the 8-bit home computers). Although some of the collision detection was rather ropey (causing many unnecessary deaths), the bouncy tune, simple yet effective level design and tight controls still hold up today. Not Dizzy's greatest adventure by any means, but it was a cut above similar titles of the time.

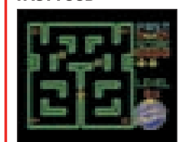
TREASURE ISLAND DIZZY



- 1987
- Various home systems
- From the cheery (though distorted) digitised speech at the beginning of Dizzy's second outing, it was obvious that the Oliver Twins had been listening to the egg's ever-growing fanbase. Not content with delivering a wonderful toe-tapping tune and improved visuals, *Treasure Island Dizzy* also saw you having to collect 30 fiendishly hidden gold coins (this collecting element would later become a series staple). While the ability to carry around three items at any one time was a great addition to the game, whoever decided to give Dizzy just the one (oh-so-easily lost) life gained the heartfelt enmity of fans everywhere.

ARCADE-

FAST FOOD



- 1987
- Various Home Systems
- Dizzy may have been rather good at adventuring, but when he was moved into other genres he usually had less success. *Fast Food* was the first non-standard Dizzy game to get released and was a poor *Pac-Man* rip-off that did little to improve on Namco's original classic coin-op. Many of its power-ups were completely pointless and added little value to the overall gameplay, while a complete lack of AI meant that the game was extremely easy to beat and quickly became monotonous. Definitely one to avoid, especially if you were unfortunate enough to hear the mind-numbing music. And Dizzy didn't even look much like Dizzy…



KWIK SNAX



- 1989
- Various Home Systems
- Unlike *Fast Food*, the Oliver Twins got everything right with *Kwik Snax* and it remains the best puzzle-based *Dizzy* game. Trapped in a single-screen maze, Dizzy had to avoid enemies by pushing blocks around and collecting each level's quota of fruit. Collecting fruit in a specific order let you score more points (like the bombs in *Bomb Jack*) and it was even possible to kill enemies by crushing them against walls or between blocks. Tight controls, reasonable visuals and some jaunty tunes all added to the experience and proved that Dizzy could cross genres if he did it well. Stay away from the C64 version, though, as it plays more like *Fast Food*.

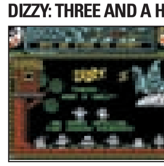
PUZZLES

FANTASY WORLD DIZZY



- 1988
- Various Home Systems
- This was where Dizzy came of age. The inclusion of his relatives added some much-needed depth to the franchise and injected plenty of humour into an already great game. Lots of text was used during the adventure, but rather than hinder progress it improved proceedings and added a storybook quality that made Dizzy's 'Ultimate Cartoon Adventure' claim much more accurate. Add a refined menu that allowed you to choose when and where you could drop objects (though you could only carry two items) along with a massive game world and it's little wonder that *Fantasy World Dizzy* is hailed as one of the egg's greatest games.

DIZZY: THREE AND A HALF



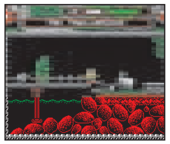
- 1990
- Spectrum
- Cover tapes were commonplace on many magazines in the Eighties and early Nineties and developers would often fill them with special one-offs starring popular characters like Monty Mole. *Dizzy: Three And A Half* was a five-screen adventure that was given away free with the Christmas edition of *Crash* magazine and saw Dizzy having to rescue his cousin Danny before reaching the entrance to Magicland. It was a brief taster of the forthcoming fourth Dizzy adventure (hence the *Three And A Half* moniker) as well as the third *Crash* tape to feature the Oliver Twins' creation. It also remains the only Dizzy game to feature Danny.

DIZZY PANIC!



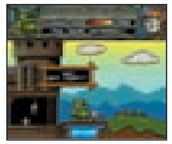
- 1990
- Various Home and Handheld Systems
- While Dizzy's adventures continued to get better, things weren't so good for his puzzle titles, with *Dizzy Panic!* being a prime example. It's yet another dull gaming experience and an extremely poor *Tetris* rip-off. Random shapes continually fell from four pipes and Dizzy had to match them up with identical holes that appeared in a movable conveyer belt. If you tried to drop a shape through the wrong hole the pipes lowered until it was game over. *Dizzy Panic!* may have boasted some nice presentation, but sluggish controls and unfair gameplay meant that this eggy outing proved to be more frustrating than challenging.

MAGICLAND DIZZY



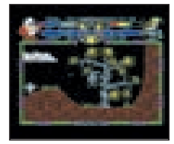
- 1990
- Various Home Systems
- *Magicland Dizzy* was the first Dizzy adventure that the Oliver Twins contracted out to Big Red Software and it proved a very wise move. While *Magicland* was as surreal as any of Dizzy's other adventures, the constant references to classic tales and fables meant that Dizzy's fourth outing was easy to relate to. Trying to wake a sleeping Dozy (who had eaten Snow White's poisoned apple) and sussing out how to retrieve Excalibur worked wonderfully and created some superb puzzles in the process. Add a much-needed energy bar – which stopped many of those annoying instant deaths – and Big Red Software ended up with a deserved hit.

DIZZY: PRINCE OF THE YOLK FOLK



- 1991
- Various Home Systems
- *Prince Of The Yolk Folk* originally appeared as part of the superb *Dizzy's Excellent Adventures* compilation, but proved so popular that it eventually received a separate release. While there's nothing wrong with the core gameplay, *Prince Of The Yolk Folk's* small size – it was only around 30 screens – meant that it took no time at all to complete and it came across as little more than filler (this was fine as part of a compilation, but a little cheeky for a standalone release). Once again created by Big Red Software, *Prince Of The Yolk Folk* proved to be yet another enjoyable – if short – Dizzy escapade.

SPELLBOUND DIZZY



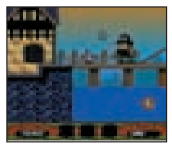
- 1990
- Various Home Systems
- At its time of release *Spellbound Dizzy* was the biggest adventure that the little egg had been in and featured over 100 screens of classic Dizzy action. While there was certainly a lot to do, *Spellbound Dizzy's* sheer size meant that there was a lot of needless backtracking and it didn't appear to have the same appeal that had been apparent in so many of Dizzy's previous adventures (who could forget the constant trips to The Sandstone Quarry?). Still, *Dizzy* fans lapped it up – particularly enjoying Dizzy's funky new animations – and *Spellbound Dizzy* was another hit for Big Red Software, Codemasters and the Oliver Twins.

BUBBLE DIZZY



- 1990
- Various Home Systems
- He'd only been around for four years but Dizzy's popularity meant that he started to appear in any old tat. *Bubble Dizzy* was another poor arcade title and saw the boxing glove-wearing hero trying to reach the top of each screen before the time ran out and he drowned. Fortunately, there were plenty of bubbles that Dizzy could hitch a ride on and the monotony was broken by having to pick up the occasional pearl. Sadly, naff controls and frustrating gameplay (curse those bursting bubbles) means that playing *Bubble Dizzy* today isn't a pleasant experience. Bizarrely, the NES version, which was a mini-game in *The Fantastic Adventures Of Dizzy*, was much better.

THE FANTASTIC ADVENTURES OF DIZZY



- 1991
- Various Home and Handheld Systems
- Although Dizzy's first NES game was finished in 1990, Codemasters' legal battle with Nintendo over its Game Genie meant *The Fantastic Adventures Of Dizzy* wasn't released until April 1991. The delay was worth it, though, as it remains one of the best Dizzy games (it combined all the best ideas from the previous titles) and proved that Dizzy could hold his own in the console market. He even found his way onto the Master System and Game Gear, and while he was never going to give Mario a run for his money, it was obvious that he could work on the newer systems. If only his adventures had continued on the Game Boy…

CRYSTAL KINGDOM DIZZY



- 1991
- Various Home Systems
- With all the previous 8-bit Dizzy games retailing for £1.99 (ah, the good old days) gamers were enraged when Codemasters expected them to shell out (pun intended) a whopping £10 for *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy*. While a development period of nine months meant that there was plenty of Dizzy action to enjoy, fans still felt short-changed. Even a free poster and stickers did little to convince fans that this was nothing more than another shameless cash-in – it was even released just in time for Christmas. Still, it certainly looked nice (especially on the 8-bit systems) and loyal fans dutifully lapped it up, so Codemasters won in the end anyway.

DIZZY DOWN THE RAPIDS



- 1991
- Various Home Systems
- What happens when you cross *Dizzy* with *Toobin'*? You get an absolute abomination of a game that cynically cashes in on Dizzy's vast success. Like *Bubble Dizzy, Dizzy Down The Rapids* was another sub-game that had first appeared in *The Fantastic Adventures Of Dizzy*, but this time Dizzy's white-water escapades didn't go down so well with his loyal fanbase. Horribly slow controls, some extremely iffy collision detection and dull, uninspired visuals did little to spur you on, and even though it was a budget game you still regretted wasting your pocket money. Easily the worst Dizzy game ever made.

GO! DIZZY GO!

- 1992
- Various Home and Handheld Systems
- *Go! Dizzy Go!* is quite unusual as it's the only Dizzy game that's only ever been available on compilations. Originally released on the NES as part of the *Quattro Arcade Collection*, it was eventually ported over to Sega's Master System (with *Dizzy The Adventurer* and *Dizzy Panic!*) as part of *The Excellent Dizzy Collection*. Like *Dizzy The Adventurer* this is another remake and this time was based upon the excellent *Kwik Snax*. Luckily, the cute, cartoony visuals and wonderful tunes greatly added to the arcade experience, and as a result *Go! Dizzy Go!* remains a terrific Dizzy puzzle game.

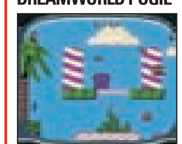
DIZZY THE ADVENTURER



- 1992
- Various Home and Handheld Systems
- Dizzy's second NES outing came free with the Aladdin Deck Enhancer and, like other Codemasters titles, was published in America by Camerica. However, it wasn't a new game at all. *Dizzy The Adventurer* was basically a remake of *Prince Of The Yolk Folk*, albeit with greatly improved sound and visuals. While it didn't take very long to complete and offered nothing to anyone who had played *Prince Of The Yolk Folk*, it once again proved that Dizzy had the potential to cross over to the more lucrative console market. If only Camerica hadn't gone bust Dizzy might have stood a better chance of conquering the consoles.

NOT RELEASED

DREAMWORLD POGIE



- N/A
- N/A
- *Dreamworld Pogie* was originally going to be released for the NES, but the Oliver Twins decided to convert it to Sega's Game Gear and make it part of a new Dizzy compilation entitled *The Excellent Dizzy Collection* when it became obvious that Codemasters wouldn't release it as a full-price game. Sadly, *Dreamworld Pogie* was cancelled after several programming staff left and the twins were unable to spare anybody else to replace them. Although it managed to reach alpha phase, the game was never released and was quickly dropped from the compilation. Maybe if Dizzy has a comeback this game will reappear…

WONDERLAND DIZZY



- N/A
- N/A
- Like the ill-fated *Dreamworld Pogie, Wonderland Dizzy* was another in-production NES title that was to be converted to the Master System and Game Gear. Sadly, the Oliver Twins hit a brick wall when Codemasters said that it only wanted the new compilation to contain one Dizzy adventure. Running out of time, the twins dropped *Wonderland Dizzy* and instead added *Dizzy Panic!* to complete the final trilogy (which included *Go! Dizzy Go!* and *Dizzy The Adventurer*). This game was intended to have an *Alice In Wonderland* feel to it, which would have worked well with the series fairy-tale elements, so its cancellation was a real shame.

CLASH OF THE TITANS

C.H.A.S.E H.Q



As gaming infiltrated the home market a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre, machine or even a developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all that opposed him. First recorded in playgrounds in the early Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine, or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of petty squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month, we take the 8-bit computer versions of *Chase HQ* for a spin.

ROUND 1: VISUALS

COMMODORE 64: What on Earth is going on here? Blocky visuals, a poor sense of speed and lazy programming totally kill what could have been a great arcade port. The programmers have basically taken the Spectrum backgrounds (minus plenty of objects) and simply placed coloured sprites on top – the results are far from pretty.

SPECTRUM: Okay, so it may be using the typical monochrome visuals for which the Spectrum is famous, but this is a frighteningly good conversion. Huge, detailed sprites, plenty of background objects (including Level 2's helicopter) and a decent representation of speed all combine to create an extremely faithful conversion that's made all the more impressive by the Spectrum's hardware abilities.

AMSTRAD: With past Amstrad racers like *OutRun* and *Power Drift* all failing to give a decent sensation of speed, we were expecting similar things from *Chase HQ*. Fortunately, this isn't the case and we have a bright, colourful racer that looks great. It was a close call between the Spectrum and Amstrad, but we're going to back the good ol' Speccy.

WINNER: SPECTRUM
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

ROUND 2: AUDIO

COMMODORE 64: Even the mighty SID chip can't save the C64. The main tune is nauseatingly bouncy and plays throughout the game, and while it's similar to the Spectrum version we expected better. Perhaps the biggest oversight is that this lacks the speech that's in the Amstrad and Spectrum 128k versions.

SPECTRUM: While the 48k version is nothing special, much more of an effort has been made with the 128k edition. The same tune as the C64 version plays on the menu screen (though, thankfully, it's not available during the game) and the sound effects are of a decent standard. Best of all is the cool digitised speech. "Let's go, Mr Driver…"

AMSTRAD: There's no music at all on the Amstrad – even the 128k version is devoid of tunes. Fortunately, the sound effects throughout the game are of a very high standard (especially the authentic sounding Turbo Boost) and the 128k edition includes speech.

WINNER: SPECTRUM
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

COMMODORE 64: As well as running like a snail, *Chase HQ* on the C64 also plays like one. Controls are astonishingly sluggish (especially with a joystick) and the lack of speed totally kills any enjoyment you have for the game. Shockingly dull to play and one of the worst C64 arcade conversions we can think of.

SPECTRUM: While it's not as responsive as its arcade parent, the Spectrum still plays a bloody good game of *Chase HQ* and definitely lets you recapture the chase-and-smash gameplay of the original. Controls are much tighter than the pathetic C64 version and you'll soon be tearing through the streets like a pro. This is basically the closest you'll ever get to *Miami Vice* on your Spectrum, so rejoice.

AMSTRAD: Again, the Amstrad's sensation of speed makes this a much better prospect than the rubbish C64 conversion (what were they thinking?) and it's pretty much identical to the Spectrum outing. It also suffers none of the collision problems we sometimes noticed (only occasionally, mind you) with the Spectrum version.

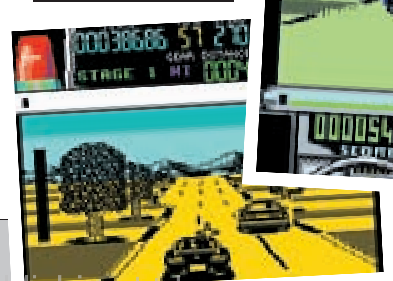
WINNER: AMSTRAD
RUNNER UP: SPECTRUM

AND THE WINNER IS…

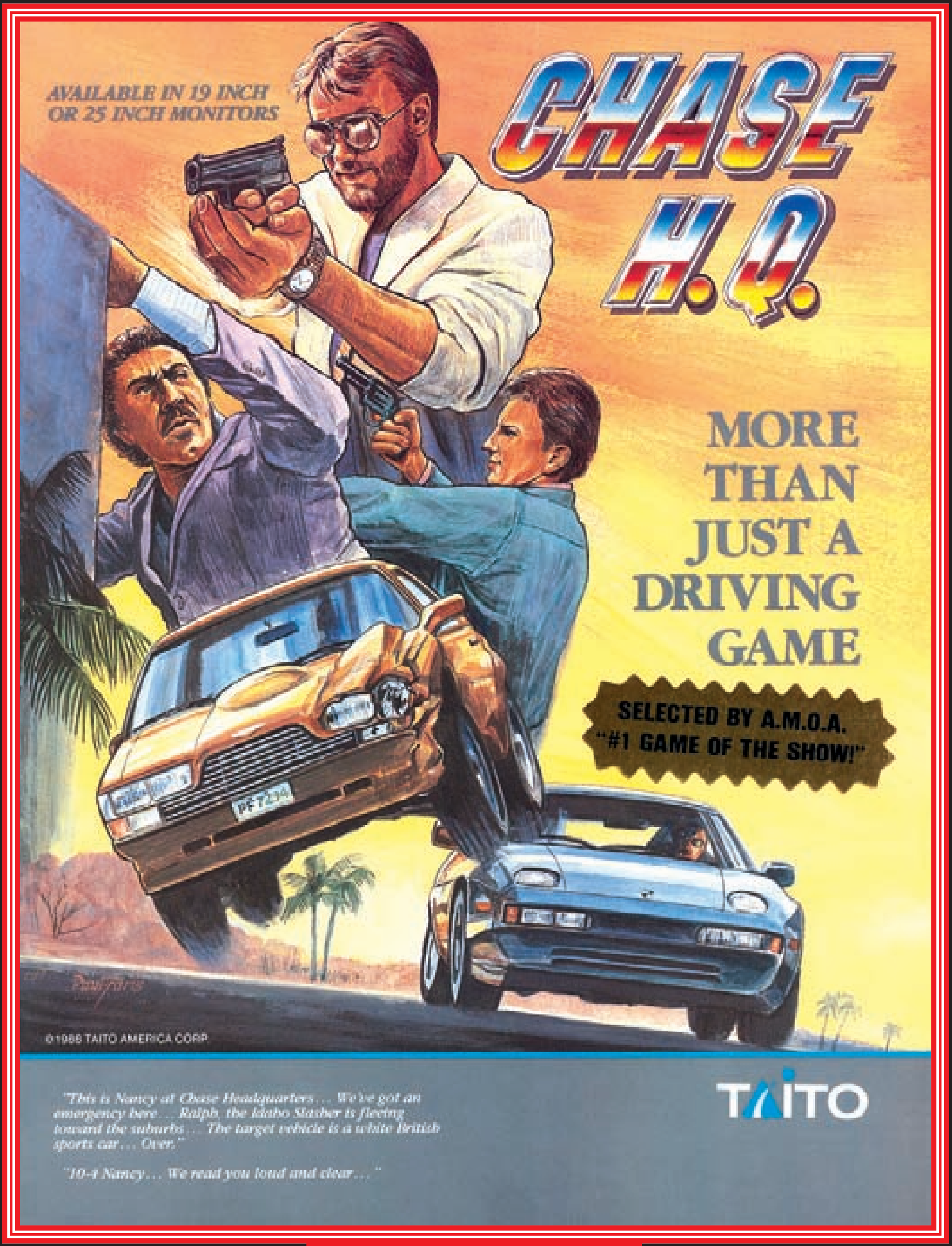
Spectrum

Considering the limitations of the various home machines, it's amazing what Ocean managed with the Spectrum and Amstrad versions of *Chase HQ*. While it would have been impossible to catch the visceral thrill of the original game, both versions tried hard and ultimately succeeded. For us, though, the sheer amount of technical brilliance that has been crammed into the Spectrum release makes it the worthy winner.

▼ It's official – the Speccy has the best home version of *Chase HQ*. And don't argue.







CHASE HQ (Arcade) Taito, 1988 – Original arcade flyer

Enter The Dragoon

Magical, mystical, beautiful and absorbing – the Panzer Dragoon series brought a bit of enchantment to Sega's troubled Saturn. John Szczepaniak looks back at a classic franchise...

Retro Feature



In all forms of media there are examples of exquisitely crafted worlds that provide the background to lengthy narratives. Worlds where every facet has been fully fleshed out and planned, and where entire new cultures have been formed. In books and film, from *The Lord Of The Rings* to *Dune*, there are examples of such magnificent works. In videogames it is no different: the realm of *Panzer Dragoon* is our equivalent of Middle-earth or Arrakis. Now, more than a decade after its creation, it still stands as a shining and beautiful example of what visionary designers can create.

March 2005 saw the tenth anniversary of this phenomenal franchise, and with the exception of a few die-hard fan sites, most people seem to have sadly forgotten the series and what it achieved. The legacy of these titles is inevitably intertwined with those of Sega and its Saturn, and as such needs to be remembered.

Ten years ago, *Panzer Dragoon* burst onto the Saturn as a launch title, courtesy of Sega's newly formed Team Andromeda studio. Once the 15-strong team had decided on the concept, it would take them 12 months to complete development. The game would showcase what the system was graphically capable of and induce a sense of awe in a generation of gamers. Some readers may recall that the magazines of the day went into shock, frantically printing scans of photos taken from Japanese publications. The excitement was certainly justified.

The game played like a natural evolution of another Sega classic, *Space Harrier*, and took the form of an intense on-rails shooter. The environments were fleshed out in full eye-popping 3D, with some scenery and enemies being formed from scaling sprites. It innovated, though, by allowing players to rotate at 90-degree angles around their dragon steed, granting a full 360 degrees of blasting



▲ Breathtaking vistas like this have been drawing gamers into the world of *Panzer Dragoon* for over ten years now. Long may it continue.



potential. Players could either lock on to targets or fire manually, and the pace was relentless with waves of enemies and some massive bosses. While visually not quite as impressive as today's games, *Panzer Dragoon* was the first taste of 'next-gen' titles after the 16-bit era. The game also earned many fans with its perfectly balanced gameplay, which resulted in a PC port.

An interesting thing about the first game that few gamers realise, and something present in later iterations, is the influence and involvement of the French artist Jean Giraud (AKA Moebius). The staff at Team Andromeda were huge fans of his work, using his art as a source of inspiration. After creating the characters, Sega sent over images and commissioned Moebius to do some illustrations. These went on to become the front and back covers for the Japanese release, which is why his name is credited. Typically, Western gamers didn't get to see these sumptuous works of art; instead, throughout the series we had appalling CG renders.

EIN UND ZWEI

For the Germanically numbered sequel – P*anzer Dragoon II: Zwei* – which is actually set prior to the events of the first game, Sega increased the development team to 20 people. It again took a full year before the game was complete, and it was released a little less than two weeks after the first anniversary of the series in 1996. The reason for setting it prior to the first game was to build on the storyline, making it a more cinematic title.

Zwei is basically *Panzer Dragoon* on steroids, with literally everything getting an upgrade. While graphically even more amazing than its predecessor, with additional shading effects and a higher frame rate, it's the game mechanics that received the greatest improvement. Unlike the first game, players began riding on the back of a flightless dragon that grew and developed between each stage. Depending on the player's performance, the dragon will evolve into a variety of different forms, the challenge, of course, being to discover them all. There is also the addition of a much-needed Berserk Attack – useful for those particularly intense sections.

If the Saturn's birth was linked with a *Panzer Dragoon* game, then in a bitter twist of irony so was its death. At least for the West, where one of the final games released in 1998 was the third *Panzer* title, *Panzer Dragoon Saga*, or *Azel: Panzer Dragoon RPG* as it was known in Japan. If the Saturn went out in a blaze of glory, then *Saga*

"A DECADE ON, PANZER DRAGOON STANDS AS AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT VISIONARY DESIGNERS CAN CREATE"

PANZER PRODUCTS

Surprisingly, there wasn't a great deal of *Panzer Dragoon* merchandise produced until the release of *Orta*. After that there was everything from mugs, badges, posters and even a special-edition white Xbox. The biggest non-game product has to be the 30-minute anime video, which is available dubbed. Unfortunately, most fans think it's dreadful, with its crude CGI for the backgrounds and a nearly non-existent storyline. It's a pity, since the games contain an incredibly rich and deep narrative that easily rivals those of other mediums.

Despite rumours, there's no evidence of any official *Panzer Dragoon* manga, though there are countless strategy guides. Even more interesting is the existence of fiction novels based on the *Panzer Dragoon* universe, though these are only available in Japan. For something more off the beaten track there's the *Arzach* graphic novel by Moebius, which greatly inspired aspects of *Panzer Dragoon*, and the two share many similarities. Although French in origin, there's no text so there's no language barrier to worry about.

Enter The Dragoon



WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN

The *Panzer Dragoon* history prior to its release is filled with rumours, speculation and several interesting screenshots, and none are more thought-provoking than those that emerged after the 1994 Consumer Electronic Show. In preparation for the eventual launch of its Saturn hardware, Sega was showcasing several prototype demos, one of which was titled '3D Shooting Game'. The subsequent magazine coverage and photos of the footage not only reveal a game that shares many similarities with *Panzer Dragoon*, but one full of clichéd ideas that would have proved quite dull if left unaltered.

Is it possible that the series we all love nearly ended up devoid of the style that defines it? The debate regarding this pre-alpha game even sparked an excellent, lengthy essay on www.panzerdragoon.net. We're unlikely to ever be certain, but can at least rest easy knowing that Team Andromeda ultimately stuck to its vision.

was one of its rallying battle cries. With only 5,000 or so English-language copies sent to each Western territory, due to the Saturn being on its last legs, the game now fetches over £100. Even the first disc of this epic four-CD game, which was given away as a demo with May 1998's *Sega Saturn Magazine* in the UK, often reaches double figures under the hammer. Such steep prices are not unwarranted, though.

Sega's account of the game's history reveals some interesting facts. Development of *Saga* actually started alongside *Zwei*, even though the game was released two years later. (This would explain why *Zwei* can recognise save data from a game released much later.) Sega also had to double the size of the team working on it, bolstering it to 40.

But like so many great works of art, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* was plagued by problems that threatened to derail the project, including the death of a team member. Things were so problematic that the entire development team went to a Japanese shrine for 'purification' in order to stave off their bad luck. Fate must have smiled on them, because they would go on to create one of the greatest games the world has known.

Saga eschewed the all-out blasting of previous games, shrewdly taking an RPG approach in order to better facilitate the amazing narrative that had been created. It was and still is like no other RPG that exists, helping to make it even more desirable today. From the outset the player was granted the massive freedom to fly where they pleased within the great Panzerian world. Within no time players were gliding across the great desert ruins watching as Sand Worms arched across the delicate skyline, which was surreally reminiscent of the Frank Herbert/David Lynch classic, *Dune*. The battle system was also unlike that of other RPGs; every aspect of it felt fresh and new, and specifically tailored to a gamer's needs. Today it stands as a title that everyone should enjoy at least once, for the overall experience and also for the dramatic change in pace and RPG mechanics.

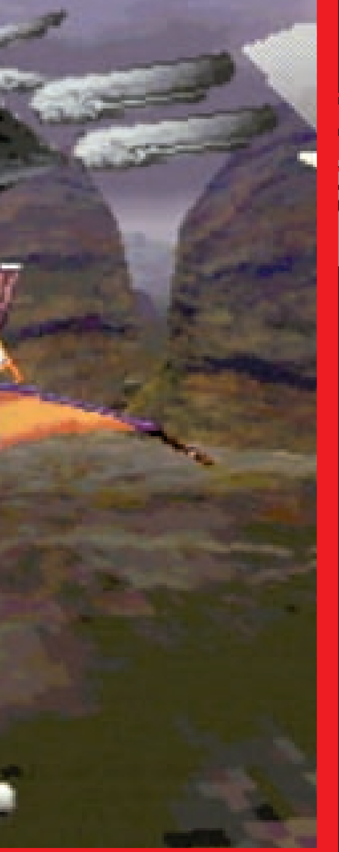
Trying to describe the epic proportions of this extraordinary classic within the confines of this feature would be a severe injustice, which is why the pinnacle of this series is further examined in the Greatest Retro Game Ever feature on page 146.

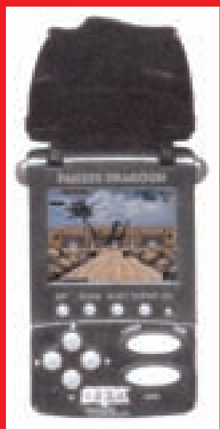
"EVERY ASPECT OF SAGA'S BATTLE SYSTEM FELT SPECIFICALLY TAILORED TO A GAMER'S NEEDS"





▲ Aerial acrobatics, giant enemies, lush environments – the *Panzer Dragoon* games have got them all.





▼ This is the ultra-rare, nigh-on legendary Pocket Arcade *Panzer*. Come on, you know you want it…

A DELICATE BALANCE

Some games are often accused of trying to be too cinematic and are said to be lacking solid gameplay. The *Panzer Dragoon* titles are some of the few that manage to maintain a perfect balance between narrative atmosphere and actual gameplay design. For the countless pages that could be written on their art styles, perfect worlds and the experience they give, at the end of the day the games within can stand on their own merits. In a modern climate seemingly averse to shoot-'em-ups there is tremendous fun to be had playing the originals. Likewise, these weren't simple, hollow games created as a vehicle for the technology. Genuine care was taken to give them some of the most striking and unique stories and styles in gaming history.

The imagery was originally envisioned by Manabu Kusunoki, who made it his goal to create something that had never been seen or experienced before. While other games followed a more generic sci-fi or medieval route, *Panzer Dragoon* had a unique fantasy setting that was awe-inspiring, although it did take some inspiration from classic animations such as *Nausicaa* and *Les Mondes Englout is*.

There is no better proof of the attention to detail lavished on its creation than the invented language spoken throughout, affectionately nicknamed Panzerese. Team Andromeda went to tremendous lengths to synthesise this new dialect (much like Tolkien did with Middle-earth languages) with its origins in ancient Greek, Latin and German. They also went on to voice all of the dialogue themselves; acting was the hobby of one of the games' designers. There's even a fan-made dictionary online: www.realitygauge.com/panzereng3.htm

POCKET PANZER

Along with three iterations on Sega's own console, *Panzer Dragoon* received three portable instalments. The first was for Tiger's ill-fated R-Zone LCD system that used interchangeable cartridges. Quite rare, sources say it was presumably released soon after the original game in order to cash in on its popularity. From here things grow complicated, since there is much debate regarding a second even rarer LCD handheld with a flip-top lid, released sometime later as part of Sega's Pocket Arcade range.

It featured a coloured background based on the early Uru stages, and gameplay consisted of manoeuvring a cursor over a 3x3 grid while shooting enemies. Some believe this to be a standalone remake of the R-Zone title, while others argue there was another handheld with special casing designs and the moniker 'Imperial Challenge'. However, little else is known about this version, so it may be consigned to the 'legend' bin of history.

There was also a Japanese Game Gear game, released in November 1996, called *Panzer Dragoon Mini*. It was wholly without narrative while the gameplay, which only involves moving a cursor and shooting, was hampered severely by the technology – there's little reason to recommend it to anyone other than collectors. Don't expect to find any of these easily, since all of them, especially the LCD games, are ridiculously rare.

NEXT-GEN DRAGOONS

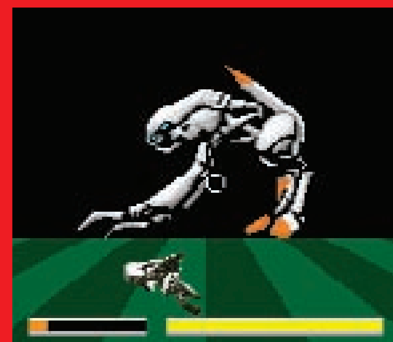
Beyond Sega's own hardware, *Panzer Dragoon* took an unusual turn. Sega's previous development teams became individual companies, such as Smilebit, which were formed by previous Team Andromeda members. It was Smilebit who went on to update the series for the next generation with the release of *Panzer Dragoon Orta* on the Xbox in 2002.

Visually it's one of the most impressive titles on the system, with souped-up gameplay to match. There was real-time dragon morphing and growth, bonus side-quests, galleries and a fully comprehensive encyclopaedia on the world, while as a special bonus you could unlock the first game that had been ported over from PC. These extra features made it perfect for fans desperate to know more precise details regarding the plot.

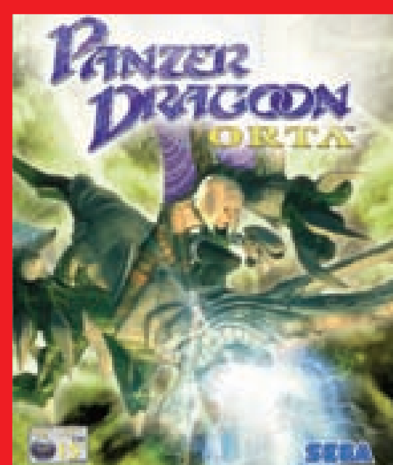
Today many gamers lament *Orta*'s poor sales. Its underperformance is a shame, since it's arguably one of the highlights of the current generation. As well as the improved gameplay and astounding aesthetics, there was another thing of note: included on all Japanese copies is a hidden English-language option that's selected automatically when played on a Western Xbox with a mod chip. Clearly, someone at Sega cares about the gamers.

Beyond *Orta* there's only speculation regarding the future of *Panzer Dragoon*. While the possibility of a follow-up RPG is incredibly exciting, we can't help but feel some trepidation. Sega has been mutating many of its best-loved franchises in an attempt to appeal to a more casual market, which would spell instant disaster for this series. However, so long as any sequel sticks to *Panzer Dragoon*'s roots, there may still be hope for the future of one of gaming's greatest franchises. □

▼ *Panzer Dragoon Mini* on the Game Gear was, um, rudimentary…







▲ Xbox's *Orta* was terrific but didn't reach a wide audience.

Greatest RETRO Game Ever

Panzer Dragoon Saga

ON A WING AND A PRAYER

Release: 1998
Format: Saturn
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Team Andromeda

Completing *Panzer Dragoon Saga* for the first time is a bittersweet experience that only the greatest games can create. After losing yourself for 20-odd hours in Team Andromeda's gorgeously constructed world, returning to reality is harsh; you're immediately struck by pangs of regret that you couldn't stay just that little bit longer.

But it's not until you finally complete the third game in the *Panzer Dragoon* series and witness its wonderfully oblique ending that you suddenly realise just how much of this amazing game you've yet to uncover. Like the very best examples of the genre – *Final Fantasy VII*, *Ocarina Of Time* – *Saga* has so many subtle secrets hidden within its wonderfully detailed environments that you can't help but return in order to retrieve every last treasure.

Sadly, few people ever got to sample Team Andromeda's masterpiece. Released in the UK just as the Saturn was going through its death throes, *Saga* just didn't reach a large enough audience (bizarre really, considering over 30,000 *Sega Saturn Magazine* readers received a free copy of disc one). Of course, it's quite possible that *Saga*'s somewhat linear beginning put many gamers off, as it initially appears to be no different from any other RPG of the time.

Hero Edge is part of a group guarding a construction site for the Empire when they uncover a strange girl (later revealed to be a Drone named Azel, *Saga*'s name in the East). Within moments of the discovery, Craymen, the Emperor's right-hand man, attacks the group and steals Azel, leaving Edge and his companions to die. Upon awaking, Edge teams up with a rare dragon and sets off in hot pursuit of Craymen, his blood boiling with revenge for his murdered workmates.

While *Saga*'s main plot was rather generic, it was driven by a selection of superb characterisations that put many similar games to shame. As the story progressed you developed a bond with these individuals that was easily as strong as the one Edge forms with his dragon, and the trials and tribulations each character faced were just as heart-rending as those of any art-house film. Indeed, Edge's realisation when he discovers the true identity of the 'divine visitor' that *Saga* constantly hints at is one of gaming's defining moments and delivers a sucker punch that Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid 2* tried to muster but couldn't.



AFTER THE ADVENTURE ENDS…

Keen to extend *Saga*'s (admittedly short) game time Team Andromeda included plenty of extras for the avid player to uncover. As well as unlocking three enjoyable mini-games – Fleet On The Lake, Dermot's Ranch and Ancient Valley – you also got the chance to return to the field map and uncover more items. Chief among these were the hidden D-Units in order to upgrade your dragon to Light Wing status, and later a powerful Solo Wing form. There was also a baby dragon to find – this was integral to achieving Solo Wing status so you had to make sure you discovered every last section of each map.





▲ *Panzer Dragoon Saga* had all the characteristic style and magic of the *Panzer Dragoon* series, but mixed it with a fascinating story with a killer twist.

BOX OF DELIGHTS

Players starting *Panzer Dragoon Saga* for the first time received a handy money boost if they had a *Panzer Dragoon II: Zwei* save. Upon starting the game, *Saga* immediately took into consideration how many hours you had spent playing *Zwei* and gave you a healthy cash bonus; for every hour you had amassed in *Zwei* you received 100 Dyne (*Saga*'s currency). Furthermore, a young girl in the holy district of Zoah gave you a music box that plays the *Zwei* theme tune whenever you made camp. Similarly, by completing *Saga* you were able to unlock Pandora's Box in *Zwei* (to save you playing the game for 30 hours). Once the box was unlocked you were able to alter virtually every aspect of the game. It was a great touch and gave you more incentive to complete each game – as if any was needed…

The believable characters that Team Andromeda created were further fleshed out by the beautifully constructed world they inhabited, and like the character development, the aesthetics grew richer the further you progressed.

After leaving the sparse (and stiflingly linear) valley that surrounded the excavation site, *Saga* gloriously unfolded as Edge reached the Garil Desert. Watching huge sand worms majestically weaving through a hostile desert instantly created an alien yet believable world, and as the four-disc epic continued the journey just got better and better.

Saga's starting to show its age now – especially whenever Edge visits a village – but the game was a revelation in 1998 and pushed the Saturn like no other title before it. Huge environments, beautifully crafted enemies, and awe-inspiring bosses were all painstakingly weaved together, with the end result being a glorious tapestry of artistic invention.

The game's blend of organic and futuristic visuals, along with its free-roaming locales that pulsed with life, provided the dedicated gamer with plenty of vivid images that became indelibly seared upon the brain. Witnessing the maelstrom of Georgius, exploring the cold underground ruins of Uru and flying beneath the never-ending form of the huge battleship Mal Kava were just a few of *Saga*'s highlights.

If the visuals had been taken to previously unseen heights, *Saga*'s superb score easily matched them. Despite its eclectic range – Team Andromeda used anything from orchestral strings to tribal drumbeats – the soundtrack never felt out of place and perfectly complemented Edge's on-screen exploits. From the tranquil theme tune that played whenever you made camp to the many rousing battle themes, *Saga* was filled with an undulating, consistently changing soundtrack that flawlessly matched the game's tempo. Underlining the superb score was a rich narrative that was delivered by some very impressive voice acting that even today puts many other games to shame.

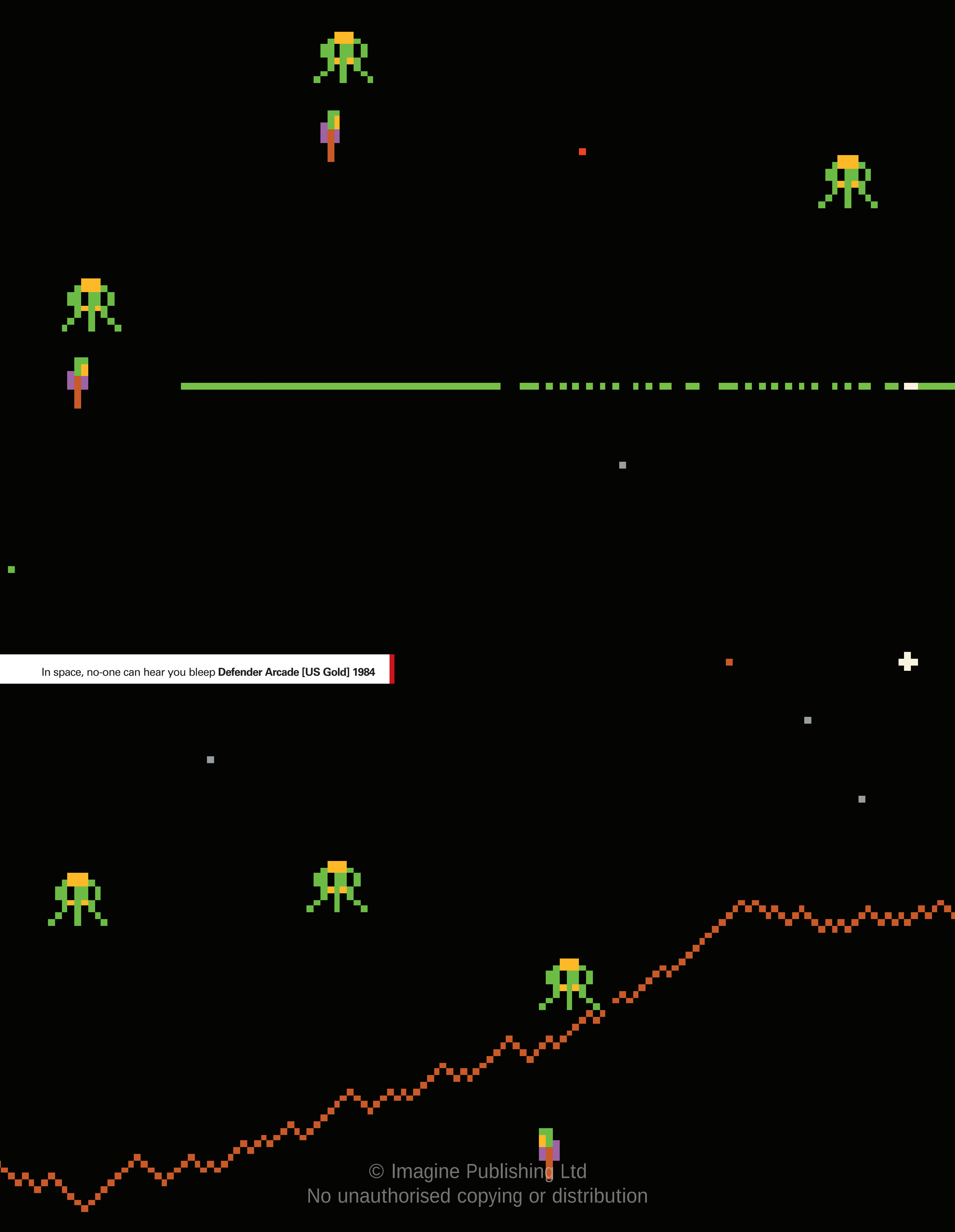
For all its beautiful aesthetics and carefully unravelling storyline it's the wonderfully constructed, real-time combat system that made *Saga* such a unique experience. The menu-driven system was a natural evolution of the original game's play mechanics and while it looked confusing it proved extremely intuitive. Three continually charging bars governed your available choices each turn and once a bar was filled you could effectively freeze the game while you considered your next move. Performing a simple action like firing Edge's gun, unleashing a barrage of lasers from your Dragon or selecting an item would cost one bar, while accessing your dragon's Berserk meter would be more.

The actual Berserk modes came in a vast array of varieties and ranged from the ability to fully heal your Dragon to devastating your opponents with massive scythes of pure energy. It was also possible to continually move around your opponents (again, a throwback to the previous games), which added another, deeper, level of strategy.

As the game progressed it become possible to morph your dragon into four new forms – Attack, Defence, Spiritual and Agility – which gradually improved the more you used them. This in turn would greatly affect the final form of your dragon, so care was needed to ensure it stayed as balanced as possible (a constantly upgraded attack dragon, for example, would end up sporting a relatively poor defence). By continually changing between abilities you unlocked unique Berserker skills, so no two games were ever the same.

Saga may be just a videogame, but it's filled with stand-out moments that transcend the disc-based medium. The jubilation felt when you successfully managed to stop the Deathmaker (a huge ground-to-air missile) from wiping out the peaceful village of Zoah is cruelly juxtaposed by the village's ruthless obliteration later in the game.

Saga delivered these dizzying highs and devastating lows with satisfying frequency and to this day remains a defining achievement for RPGs and Sega alike.



In space, no-one can hear you bleep **Defender Arcade [US Gold] 1984**



A DROP IN THE OCEAN

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE NUMBER-ONE MOVIE, TV AND ARCADE CONVERSION SOFTWARE COMPANY THAT BROUGHT US SUCH CLASSICS AS BATMAN, ROBOCOP AND OPERATION WOLF? RETRO INVESTIGATES…

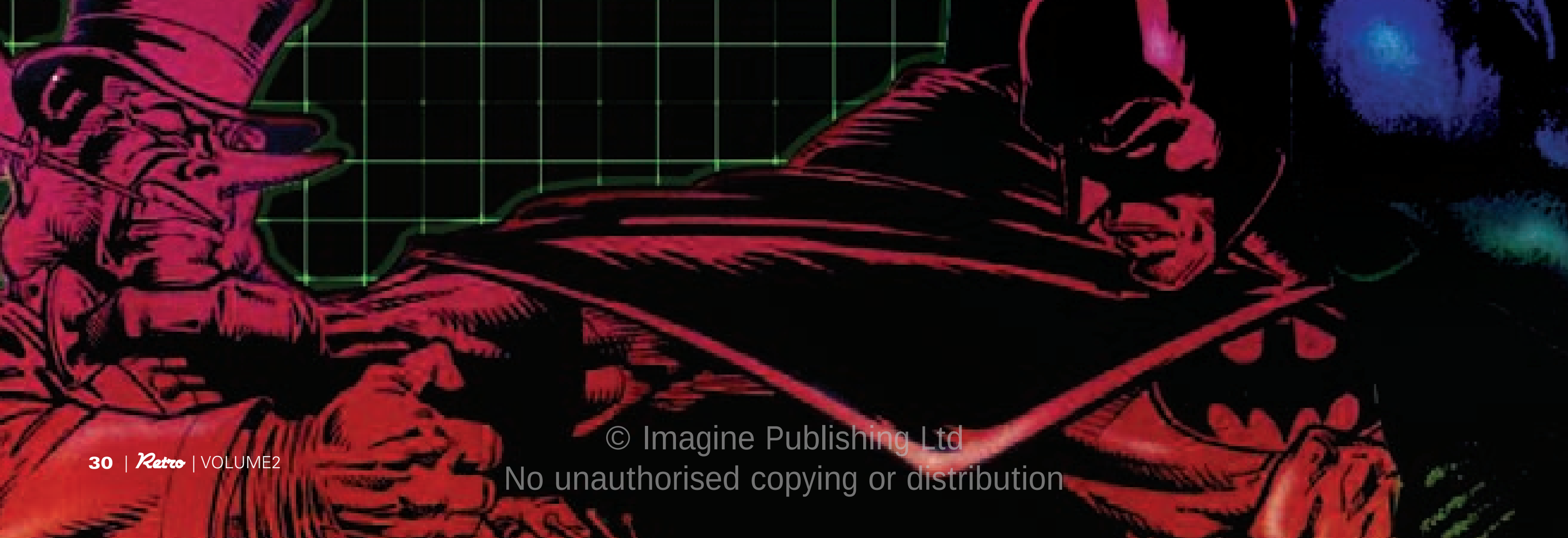
Ocean will be a familiar brand to many, whether they're heavily into retro gaming or not. During the Eighties and early Nineties it was one of the largest and most respected publishers in the games industry, frequently voted 'software house of the year', and responsible for a vast number of titles for the 8-bit and 16-bit platforms. Famed for its licensed titles and arcade conversions (some of which, admittedly, weren't that good), Ocean dominated the industry for over 12 years. Not bad for a company set up on a hunch.

Ocean founder David Ward was an entrepreneur with a knack for being in the right place at the right time. Not only was he able to spot new trends, but he was quick to act on them. This had already worked for him in the late Seventies and early Eighties as he imported exotic clothes into the UK (even if his first foray landed him a Spanish prison). A trip to America in 1983 gave him an inkling that computer games were likely to be the next big thing, and on his return to Britain he set up shop in Manchester.

Ward may not have have had any experience in what was still a relatively new industry, but it didn't really matter. He knew how to sell products and his strong background in marketing immediately gave him the edge over his competitors. He placed adverts in order to find out what systems were popular and the types of games that people wanted to actually play. It was then simply a case of finding the relevant people who were able to create them. At the end of its first year, Ocean had a turnover of £500,000 and had shifted around 200,000 games; by 1988 this had increased to an estimated £10 million, with some 3 million games sold.

BIG BOSSES

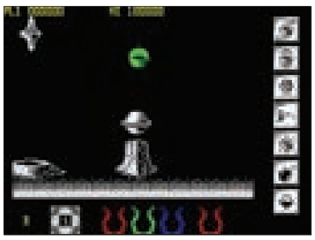
Gary Bracey, former development director at Ocean, says that one of the biggest factors in the success of the company was the influence of David Ward and managing director Jon Woods. "Ocean was run by two very astute businessmen, who identified the potential early on and heavily marketed their brand," says Bracey. "Also, Ocean would not have thrived for so long if it had consistently released poor products. Fortunately, there were many truly great Ocean games, which tend to get ▶



AN INTERVIEW WITH
MARK JONES

Time at Ocean: Two years
Job title: Graphic designer
Selected Softography: *Arkanoid, Magmax, Wizball, Gryzor, Vindicator, Dragon Ninja, Rambo III, Total Recall*

Anything you're particularly proud of from your time at Ocean?
Getting a *Crash* Smash for *Wizball*. When I was at school, *Crash* magazine was like the Bible if you owned a Spectrum, so anything that got a Smash was a must-have. Owning an original copy of a game *Crash* had Smashed was a great status symbol in the playground.



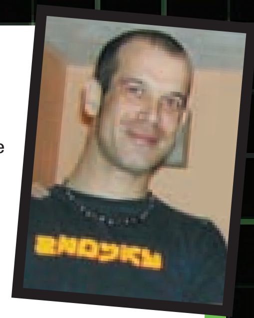
Oh, those were the days.

Was there much pressure working on the Spectrum version of *Wizball*?
No, none at all. Although once I'd finished all my graphics, the programmer took another three months to actually finish the code. As a result, lots of the stuff I'd worked on was chucked out, which meant that many of the previews in magazines featured screens that weren't in the finished game.

You created a lot of loading screens. How long did they take?
I loved working on loading screens. I suppose it was because you had more freedom in what you produced, and didn't have a programmer leaning over you saying 'I can't scroll something that big' or 'there's way too many frames in that animation!'. They normally took three or four days then you'd spend another day or so tweaking bits. The loading screens are the things I'm most proud of.

How did you find the transition between 8-bit and 16-bit?
At first it was really hard. I had only worked on the Spectrum and had no experience at using colours; anti-aliasing was totally alien to me. Fortunately, I got a lot of help from Simon Butler who took me under his wing. The biggest problem I found was that everything took a lot longer to produce; you could spend days tweaking coloured pixels just because something didn't look right.

Any other major game problems?
While we were designing the graphics for *Total Recall* the programmer kept faffing about with a scroll routine that featured street graphics and a man running on the spot. It stayed the same week after week, then he started 'working at home'. Eventually Ocean realised that he didn't have a clue and pulled the plug.



Any interesting moments during your time at Ocean?
I was interviewed in 1988 for a kids' program called *Chegwin Checks It Out* with Keith Chegwin while I was working on *Vindicator*. Sadly, I looked a bit of a geek at the time with teenage spots; it was all very embarrassing.





FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT OCEAN, VISIT THE OCEAN EXPERIENCE AT...
HTTP://THEOCEANEXPERIENCE.CO.UK

Retro Feature

Retro

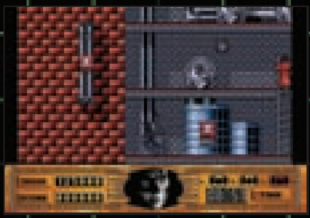
LICENCE TO THRILL

OCEAN WAS WELL KNOWN FOR THE COIN-OP AND FILM LICENCES IT RELEASED. WHILE THERE WERE QUITE A FEW STINKERS, MANY WERE ACTUALLY VERY GOOD. HERE ARE A FEW OF OUR FAVOURITES…

BATMAN – THE MOVIE

Released: 1989
Genre: Arcade action
Team: Mike Lamb, Dawn Drake, Matthew Cannon
Tie-in with: DC Comics

Batman had quite a few outings on the 8-bit machines, but few were prepared for the great film tie-in that Ocean released. Like *Robocop* it was made up of various gameplay elements, all of which were pretty good. Although the 8-bit versions were fine, it's the jaw-dropping Amiga and Atari ST ports that really stunned us. The well-designed platform sections were totally surpassed by the death-defying (and stunning looking) flying sequences. Even today it all looks very impressive.



▲ The Dark Knight proved to be a dark horse, surprising gamers with this quality tie-in.

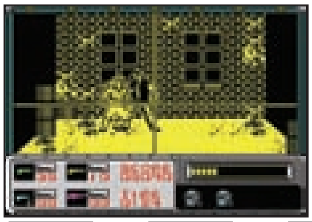
ROBOCOP

Released: 1989
Genre: Arcade action
Team: Mike Lamb, Dawn Drake, Jonathan Dunn
Tie-in with: Orion Pictures movie

From the moment you started playing *Robocop* it was obvious that Ocean had another hit on its hands. Great gameplay, plenty of variation and some superb music (especially on the C64) ensured *Robocop* was a hit with gamers everywhere. It may have lacked the gore that made the movie famous, but the excellent gameplay easily made up for this.



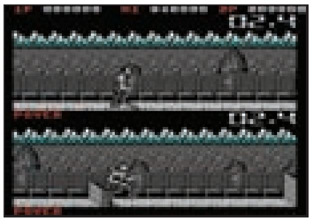
▲ *Robocop* was terrific, but our hero still had that vulnerable lower-face thing going on…

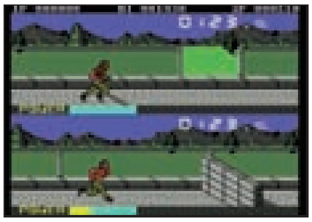


COMBAT SCHOOL

Released: 1987
Genre: Arcade action
Team: Mike Lamb, Andrew Deakin, Ivan Horn, David Whittaker
Tie-in with: Konami arcade machine

Damn you, Ocean, we've lost count of the amount of joysticks that we went through while playing *Combat School*. Best remembered for its superb remix of *I Want To Be Your Drill Instructor*, *Combat School* was a frantic joystick waggler that perfectly captured all the thrills and excitement of its Konami arcade parent.





THE UNTOUCHABLES

Released: 1989
Genre: Arcade action
Team: Special FX Software – Jonathan Dunn
Tie-in with: Paramount Pictures

Like many of Ocean's later hits, *The Untouchables* mixed a range of game styles with great success. Whether you were running through empty warehouses or trying to protect a runaway pram, the end results perfectly reflected the film they were based on, even if a little 'artistic licence' was used here and there.

While the various shooting stages were very well put together (particularly on the SNES and Amiga versions) it's the superb Odessa Steps homage that stands out the most.



THE NEW ZEALAND STORY

Released: 1989
Genre: Arcade platform game
Team: Choice Software – G Weatherup, Jonathan Dunn
Tie-in with: Taito arcade machine



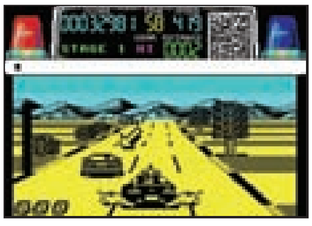
Ocean had a very strong relationship with Taito, so the wonderfully cute adventures of Tiki the Kiwi became a superb conversion that was a big hit. The Amiga and Atari ST versions were particularly good and still play extremely well today. Massive cute whales, arrow-firing teddy bears and boomerang-throwing soldiers were just a few of the enemies you had to deal with and all the while an incredibly jaunty theme tune played in the background. And let's face it, any game that features a cute leopard seal as its main boss has got to be a winner.

CHASE HQ

Released: 1989
Genre: Arcade action
Team: John O'Brien, Bill Harbison, Jonathan Dunn
Tie-in with: Taito arcade machine

For many, this is one of Ocean's greatest coin-op conversions. The Spectrum version in particular was extremely faithful to the arcade original (especially the superior 128k version) and it was only the risible C64 outing that really disappointed. While the 8-bit conversions could never hope to catch the insane thrills of their arcade parent, all the white-knuckle gameplay was mercifully intact.

Even the sequel was pretty good, but in our minds it's the original that deserves all the praise. A great arcade racer and a superb home port. If only all Ocean's many, many conversions were up to this standard.



forgotten as we were always synonymous with the many licences we produced."

Although early Ocean titles weren't exactly gaming masterpieces, Ward was adept at realising that a game didn't necessarily need to be the best around, it simply had to be available to the retailers and recognised by the general public. Because of this, film and TV licensing became an important part of the Ocean strategy and during the mid-Eighties it churned out a mountain of low-quality games with famous names on the boxes.

"To be honest, we were initially going for the 'granny purchase'," explains Bracey. "Computer games were relatively new and if a relative wanted to buy a game as a present they wouldn't know their *Elite* from their *Blagger*. By offering titles they were familiar with – and artwork which was also recognisable – we managed to capture an essential part of the market."

Between 1983 and 1992, licences and arcade conversions made up nearly 50 per cent of the 8-bit titles Ocean released. While many of these early games were highly dubious – titles like *Highlander*, *Street Hawk* and the infamous *Knight Rider* immediately spring to mind – Ocean was more than capable of releasing solid, enjoyable licences when it wanted to. *Robocop*, *Batman – The Movie*, *Platoon* and *The Addams Family* were all superb tie-ins that were massive hits with both critics and public alike when they hit the 8- and 16-bit formats.

GROWING UP

Ocean was able to corner the market on familiar game names when it bought Imagine in 1985. (The tale of Imagine's rise and fall is almost as epic as the Ocean story but, sadly, there isn't room to go into it here.) The acquisition of Imagine allowed Ocean to dedicate a part of the company to film and arcade licences (and the occasional original title), and with one of its rivals out of the picture Ocean's dominance within the industry grew. Key arcade titles like *Hyper Sports*, *Arkanoid*, *Renegade*, *Slap Fight* and *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* were just a few of the 50-plus titles that Imagine released for the 8-bit formats and it bolstered Ocean's output considerably.

MAKING MOVIES

Although the company released more than 115 titles on the Spectrum alone – leading, inevitably, to a scattershot approach to quality – as Ocean expanded it did take much more care when choosing licences. Although, as Bracey explains, it didn't mean that Ocean was impervious to mistakes.

"We were sent dozens of scripts from movies that were in pre-production – I still have many of them in my loft," he says. "*Robocop* was the first real speculative film which we took on as an unknown, but based on the strength of the script. The biggest mistake I personally made was choosing *Hudson Hawk*. The script, by Shane Black, was absolutely fantastic, but the film that was released bore no resemblance at all to the original treatment. A shame really, as it could – no, should – have been an excellent movie."

Ocean's arcade conversions went through a similar process and while early titles like *Mario Bros* and *Donkey Kong* failed to impress the games-buying public (despite being excellent arcade games) later titles had a lot more success.

TOP DRAWER

Will Harbison joined Ocean as a graphic designer in March 1988 and began work on arcade conversions like *Chase HQ* and *Bad Dudes Vs Dragon Ninja*. He's particularly proud of *Chase HQ* and still remembers the ups and downs of the Spectrum conversion. "When doing an arcade conversion the only thing we had to do was make sure the Spectrum graphics looked as much like the arcade game as possible," he reveals. "I think with *Chase HQ*, myself and John O'Brien did the best job that we possibly could. It was impossible to rip the graphics from the original arcade board so this

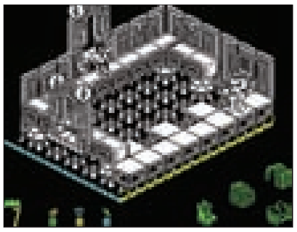
AN INTERVIEW WITH JON RITMAN



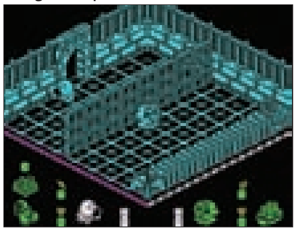
Time at Ocean: Three years (1984-87)
Job title: Freelance programmer
Selected Softography: *Head Over Heels, Batman, Match Day, Match Day II*

How did your relationship with Ocean come about?
I was at a Microfair at Alexandra Palace showing *Bear Bovver* when I found myself next to Ocean's David Ward and watching a truly crap soccer game (the one that was later re-released as *World Cup Carnival*). I commented that the game I was doing was going to be a thousand times better – a bit strong considering I had only started it the week before.

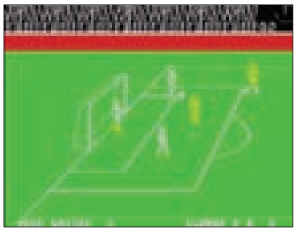
Anyway, some eight months later he phoned me out of the blue (I never did ask how he got my number) and asked if I'd finished it. By chance I was only a couple of weeks before the end and he promptly offered me a lot of money for it – at the time it was more money than I had ever had. Needless to say I accepted and a relationship was born.



What was your relationship like with Ocean on a personal and professional basis?
It was excellent. They were never on my back despite my complete failure to ever deliver in time for Christmas and they always supplied me with whatever kit I needed to get a game finished. In some ways the failure to hit Christmas may have helped me, as when my games were released at Easter the competition was often smaller and the magazine publishers had little else to fill their pages.



Do you think that games like *Head Over Heels* and *Match Day* would have achieved the same level of exposure if they had been released by a different games publisher?
Probably not – Ocean was one of the biggest companies around at the time. I was offered a very good deal for *Match Day II* by Mirrorsoft but when I told Ocean about it, they simply matched it and I stayed where I was.



What prompted the decision to part ways with Ocean?
The chance to work with Rare came up and I was so impressed with everything Ultimate had done in the past that I couldn't miss the opportunity. It was a strange situation as I wrote to Rare after they had a large piece published in a magazine and got invited up for an interview.

To tell the truth I didn't even realise it was an interview as I was riding so high after the Ocean years that I just assumed they would want me. Later Tim Stamper [Rare co-founder] told me it was the sheer arrogance that got to them as it clearly hadn't crossed my mind that they could have turned me down.

How long were you working for Ocean?
Fortunately, I never had any sort of contract deal; I simply made my games and offered them to Ocean. The four games probably covered about four years [around 1984-87, non-maths fans], as I was fairly lazy, thinking nothing of taking three-month breaks in the middle of a game.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN LOMAX



Time at Ocean: Five years (1992-97)
Job title: Artist
Selected Softography: *Dennis, Jurassic Park II, Silver, Dawn Of Darkness*

How did you first get into videogaming?
Ever since I got a Philips G7000 console for Christmas I've been hooked on games. I got into the industry through creating Amiga demos. Many of my friends at the time kept telling me to send in some work to game companies, so I did. I must have sent demos to five or six big companies at the time; luckily, Ocean offered me a position.



How would you describe your time at Ocean?
The first few years were fantastic times, although later on, once Ocean got 'acquired' by Infogrames, things started to take a turn for the worse. To be honest, the times during the creation of *Jurassic Park II* were some of the best times I've ever had in the industry to date and I miss them greatly.



Was there much pressure to produce the goods when working on film and TV licences?
Well, there could be times when film companies would frustrate the hell out of you with bizarre requests like asking for game sprites to accurately represent the real life actors when you only had 32 pixels to play around with. Completion deadlines would also often be tied to the film release, so hitting these was vital or you would seriously impact on the game sales if your title wasn't completed in time.



Were any games particularly hard to finish?
Not so much hard to finish, but it was more that you couldn't see when the end was. A couple of projects seemed to drag on and on, with *Silver* in particular taking an extremely long time to finish.



Did you work on any games that never saw the light of day?
Definitely. I think most developers at some point in their careers work on projects that never see the light of day for some reason or another. At Ocean I only really worked on a couple of prototype projects that ended up getting canned, although they were nothing worth mentioning if I'm really honest. Although during my time at Ocean, other teams had virtually completed *Green Lantern* for the SNES and *The Shadow* for the Mega Drive, and neither game ended up getting released.



What are you doing now?
I'm currently working for Gizmondo Studios and am creating games for the launch of its new Gizmondo handheld.

meant we had to play the arcade machine for hours on end to get a feel for its gameplay. It was hell, it really was."

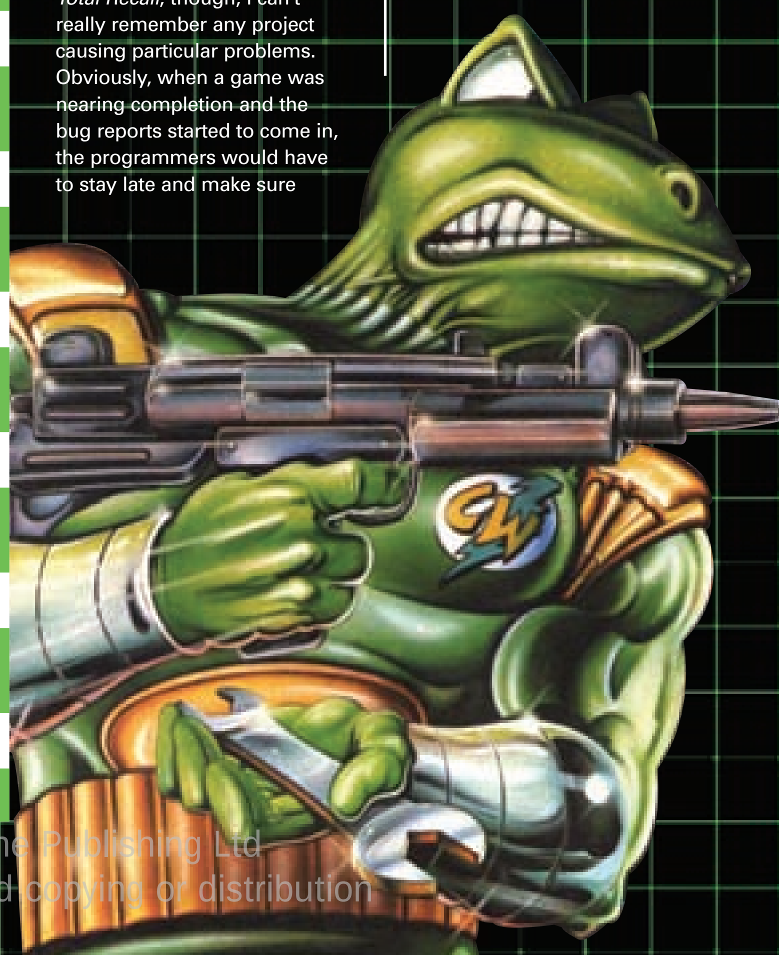
Harbison soon found himself working on Ocean's more prestigious titles, and while he played a pivotal role in the production of *Batman – The Movie*, creating the 3D flying sections, a lack of input from Warner Bros meant he had to go that extra mile in order to do the best job possible. "Although Warner Bros sent us plenty of storyboards, the script and early photographs of the Batman costume, we were still missing crucial things," he explains. "I had to go and buy myself a toy Batmobile to use as reference for the 3D driving sections in order to finish them."

TENSE TIMES

Considering the vast amount of money that was pumped into licences, Harbison found working on them relatively stress-free, although there was always the odd game that would cause a few problems. "*Total Recall* on the Commodore 64 was a particularly tense time," he recalls. "I think every artist in the building worked on that to get it out on time. Apart from *Total Recall*, though, I can't really remember any project causing particular problems. Obviously, when a game was nearing completion and the bug reports started to come in, the programmers would have to stay late and make sure there were no major crashes or glitches. Us artists, on the other hand, actually had it pretty easy."

Unsurprisingly, Ocean's development teams and project times were very different to modern working methods, with many of the Spectrum teams consisting of just three people – a programmer, an artist and someone to take care of the audio. "Early on, we were looking at an average of three months to start and finish both a Commodore 64 and Spectrum title," says Bracey. "One particularly difficult time was the conversion of *Wizball* on the Spectrum. The programmer at the time – one month from completion – stated he wanted X thousand pounds or he wouldn't finish the game. I won't go into how that one was resolved, though…"

Still, despite occasional disagreements, there was strong team spirit and a great deal of enthusiasm at Ocean. "The early days were hard, but very rewarding," says Bracey. "As a new entertainment industry, we made up the rules as we went along. Most of the people involved, especially in the development side, were still



relatively young, so there was a great deal of energy. I know it's a tired adage but we worked hard and played hard."

LOST TITLES

Inevitably, while plenty of big-name games did get released, there were more than a few titles that never got off the drawing board, or, even worse, were stopped mid-development. "There were quite a few that sunk without a trace, usually down to problems with licences or because the external teams weren't making a good job of the game," remembers Harbison. "The only one I wish I had managed to actually finish was an isometric *Simpsons* game that I was working on with Paul Hughes for the Amiga. It was looking really good but got shelved after Ocean bought the rights to convert a NES game called *Bart Vs The Space Mutants*."

Similarly, Gary Bracey was disappointed when a deal to produce *Lobo* (a popular comic book character) fell through, and he's still pained when he thinks about the game that *Jurassic Park* could have been (although it was still very good). "We had some great ideas for *Jurassic Park*, particularly on the PC and Amiga," he says. "The intention was to create a *Doom*-type game in 3D – bear in mind that this was pre-*Doom*. Sadly, timing just got the better of us and we had to reconfigure the design so that the development time would fit in better with the movie release. Bear in mind that this was a huge licence for us, as we had never paid a seven-figure guarantee for a licence before (neither had anyone else at the time) – so much was riding on it. In order to maximise the value, we really needed to release the game as closely to the movie release as possible."

NEW FRIENDS

Regardless of what people thought of its constant film and arcade tie-ins, Ocean was perfectly capable of publishing highly innovative software. Ironically, this was partly due to the success of the licensed titles. "It was the revenue earned from these types of mass-market games that generated money which allowed Ocean to invest in many more original games, such as those from Sensible Software, Jon Ritman and DID," says Bracey.



▶ Head and Heels were the brainchildren of Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond, and their game – *Head Over Heels* (funnily enough) – was a big hit for Ocean.

These original titles weren't always developed by in-house teams, but Ocean had a knack of surrounding itself with some of the best talent in the industry, and Bracey made sure that the partnerships always ran smoothly. "Jon Ritman was very much of the 'it'll be ready when it's ready' school, which is obviously frustrating when you are managing the project, but he always made it worth the wait," he says. "Denton Designs, on the other hand, constantly tried pushing the envelope in terms of innovation and originality. Sometimes it paid off, sometimes not. However, we always got along pretty well."

ALL IN ONE

While it was adept at attracting talented individuals and development teams, Ocean was also quick to capitalise on market trends. Following the success of the *Soft Aid* compilation (released to support Band Aid), David Ward and Jon Woods realised that gamers were prepared to pay again for old titles. In 1985, Ocean's first compilation, *They Sold A Million*, was released. Containing Ocean's *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*, US Gold's *Beach Head*, Software Projects' *Jet Set Willy* and Ultimate's *Sabre Wulf*, the project proved very lucrative for all involved. "Ocean licensed the other titles from the original publishers," explains Bracey about the inclusion of key non-Ocean titles. "Bear in mind that this was an opportunity for a 'second bite of the cherry', which had previously not existed. Being part of such a prestigious ▶



compilation was potentially very lucrative." It was a deal that paid off handsomely and Ocean was soon churning out compilations at an astonishing rate, with bold flashy titles like *The Magnificent 7*, *100% Dynamite* and *2 Hot 2 Handle*. These packs were attractive to the consumer and proved a great way to extend a game's longevity. "Capturing the secondary market was important and it became increasingly more critical in later years when the shelf-life of most games was just a couple of weeks," says Bracey. "The format would probably work today, but I think the secondary market is now dominated by budget titles, a concept which works equally well."



BRAND BUYOUT

Ocean was eventually bought by Infogrames (now trading as Atari) in 1996. While rumours abound of spiralling debt problems (rumours that remain unsubstantiated), one particular tale has been laid to rest by Bracey. Some theories say that *Robocop 3* was one of the main culprits behind Ocean's downfall; it was alleged that Ocean spent a fortune on copy protection for it, which was then immediately cracked, leading to massive losses for the publisher.

"It's an urban myth, I'm afraid," reveals Bracey. "Piracy was rife and we were offered a new, dongle-based security system that would (allegedly) prevent copying. I saw it more as a deterrent to the casual/ playground copier than the more hardcore hacker. There was a price to the dongles that made the manufacturing cost of the game a little more than normal. But as for leading to financial problems? It really is complete nonsense – not only that, it isn't even slightly true. Ocean had no financial problems at that time. Still, I guess it makes for a nice story though."

Although Infogrames initially kept the Manchester offices open, for development and Q&A (Infogrames Q&A is still based there), the development studio was moved to Sheffield and relocated at Gremlin's old offices (Infogrames bought Gremlin in 1999). Shortly after that, the Ocean name was dropped and a great era in gaming came to a close. It was a sad end to an established brand, and it's surprising that Infogrames never kept the name going.

It's a decision that confuses Bracey. "I don't know why it didn't maintain the Ocean brand, which I think was very upsetting to everyone who had been involved with the company over the years," he admits. "There was a great deal of pride when you told people you worked for Ocean and it was sad to see the brand abandoned."

NET LIFE

While the brand may be no

AN INTERVIEW WITH JONATHAN SMITH



Time at Ocean: Three years (1984-87)
Job title: Games programmer
Selected Softography: *Hyper Sports, Cobra, Firefly, Midnight Resistance, Daley Thompson's Super Test*

What was your time at Ocean like?
It was daunting at first. Being a games programmer meant doing anything from game programming to drawing graphics, doing the sound effects and music, and even writing the inlay instructions. It was also quite a competitive atmosphere where all the programmers tried to technically impress and outdo each other – in the nicest possible way, of course.



You worked on quite a few arcade and film licences. What sort of problems did these present?
The arcade conversions were easy as you had a definitive design to work from. Sadly, the ZX Spectrum was always problematic as it didn't have any hardware. In a way this worked to your advantage, as you had to be more inventive in a way that other programmers on 'better' formats didn't need to be. The film licences all ended up being the 'Ocean Scrolling Platform Game™'. I tried to do something slightly different with the design for *Red Heat* but failed miserably – please forgive me?

What was it like working on big licences like *Batman*?
Working on *Batman* sounds like a dream come true but in reality was a bit of a nightmare. DC Comics had strict rules and regulations – pages of them – which had to be adhered to. The game design had to be constantly submitted for approval, changed, then re-submitted and all the while the deadline clock was ticking away. You had teams of people developing parts of a game that might have to be radically changed or disregarded completely.

***Midnight Resistance* must have been a difficult game to convert. Were there any problems with it?**
All the sprite graphics were pulled from the arcade ROMs and because of the sensible way the developers had laid out the palettes it was an easy task to convert them to all the formats, although the background graphics and maps were all done from scratch for some reason. Fast horizontal scrolling on an Atari ST was always going to be difficult so I didn't bother, opting for a 'block shift' technique instead. Lack of time and money meant that scrolling levels weren't possible.

Are there any interesting stories you can tell us about your time at Ocean?
Not without putting my foot in it – I've already got into loads of trouble for kissing and telling! I even had to have my words struck from a website interview I did a few years back…

more, its spirit lives on at Will Harbison's excellent website, The Ocean Experience. It's sparked a massive amount of interest among fans and has become a regular haunt for many of Ocean's former staff.

"The website was originally just a place for me to show some old articles that I'd saved, and some of the photos and cartoons I'd drawn while working at Ocean," explains Harbison, clearly pleased with the site's success. "I only started work back on the site in January after an absence of about three years; since then it's just exploded. Old work colleagues are constantly getting back in touch and sending me stuff to put on the website – it's becoming an Ocean shrine."

Indeed, the likes of Bracey, Simon Butler, John Lomax and Jon Dunn are just a few of the staff who you'll find reminiscing about the good old days and sharing valuable nuggets of information about the company, and it's obvious that working for Ocean has affected them greatly. "There's a real nostalgia trip happening which is great to see," says Harbison. "Another great plus is that there are loads of people on the site who just enjoyed playing the games, which is always a treat."

FULL CIRCLE

Though many former Ocean employees have moved away from Manchester, Harbison is still there, and is currently making mobile titles for Rockpool Games. "It's a bit like the old days with quite short projects on a variety of different subjects," he says of the similarities between now and the Ocean era. He also likes to help out at retro-remake website Retrospec whenever he has the chance, although his spare time is becoming a thing of the past.

Ocean may have gone, but it still haunts the retro-gaming community, and Harbison seems to be inexplicably linked to the restless spirit. "It's very weird, but I'll soon be moving premises to an office that I used to work in while I was at Ocean," he says. "It's certainly funny how these things come full circle sometimes." ■

Ocean

BOX OFFICE BOMBS

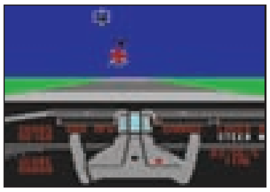
CONSIDERING THE VAST AMOUNT OF GAMES THAT OCEAN RELEASED, IT WAS INEVITABLE THAT SOME OF THEM WEREN'T EXACTLY CLASSICS. COVERING OUR NOSES WITH THE STRONGEST OF PEGS, WE GET DOWN AND DIRTY AND LOOK AT SOME OF OCEAN'S BIGGEST MIS-HITS

KNIGHT RIDER

Released: 1986
Genre: Shoot-'em-up
Team: Antony R Lill, Gary Knight, F David Thorpe
Tie-in with: Universal TV series

Gamers had to wait over a year for the arrival of Ocean's *Knight Rider* but, sadly, it wasn't worth their time. Dull level design, god-awful controls and incredibly ropey visuals meant that *Knight Rider* was one of Ocean's biggest turkeys. Avoid like the plagueiest plague.

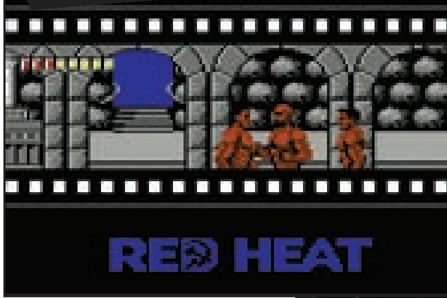




RED HEAT

Released: 1989
Genre: Beat-'em-up
Team: Special FX Software
Tie-in with: Carolco Pictures movie

Ocean managed to take monotony to new levels by creating one of the dullest games we've ever had the misfortune to play. Constantly punch enemies as they shuffle towards you and, er, that's about it. Even the mini-games were abysmal.



STREET HAWK

Released: 1986
Genre: Arcade action
Team: Paul Owens, F David Thorpe, H Nuandsyz
Tie-in with: Universal TV series

Bizarrely based on *Defender*, of all things, *Street Hawk* saw you shooting down helicopters and rescuing the survivors. It may have featured some reasonably impressive flicker-free visuals, but the controls and gameplay were simply horrible. Another spectacular waste of a licence.





▲ Don't be tempted to dig this one up – trust us, it really is pretty poor.

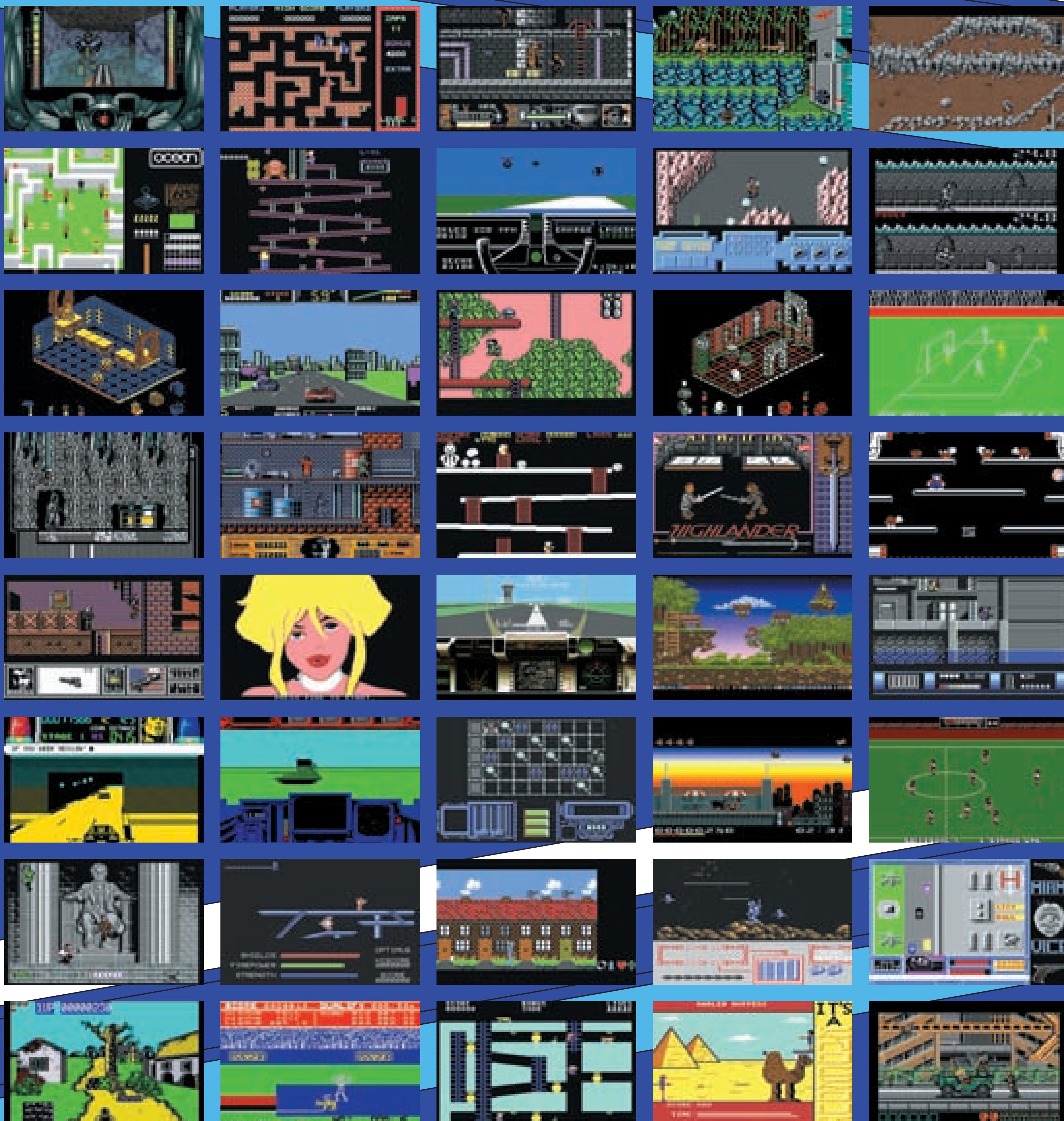
TRANSFORMERS

Released: 1986
Genre: Platform
Team: Denton Designs
Tie-in with: Hasbro Industries toy brand

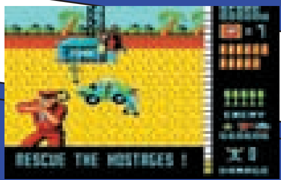
Considering the past collaborations between Denton Designs and Ocean, *Transformers* was quite a surprise – and not in a good way. Poorly designed sprites, simple animation and horrible colour clash weren't helped by unresponsive controls and dull gameplay. And the vital transformations were rubbish.



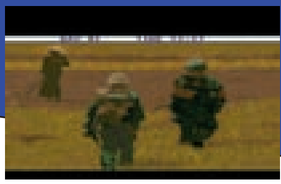
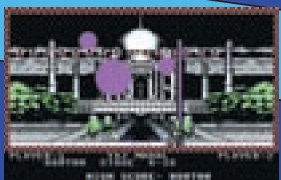
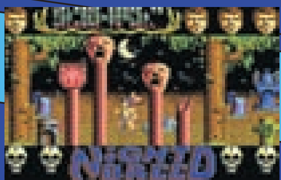
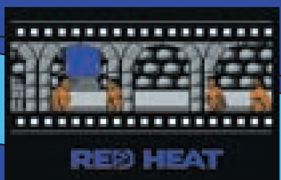
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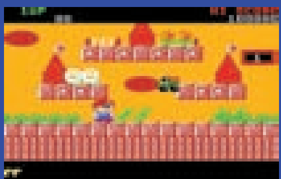
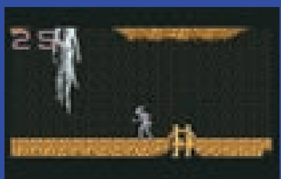
Classic feature

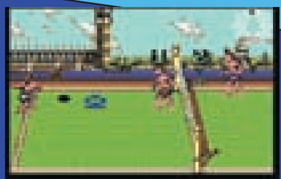



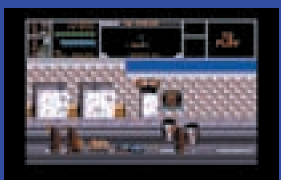


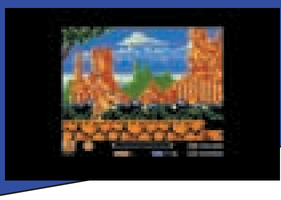
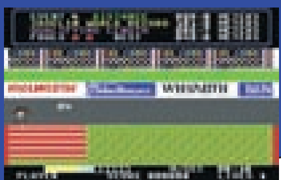


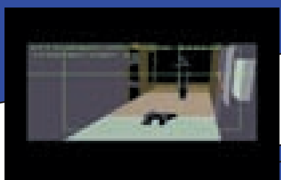



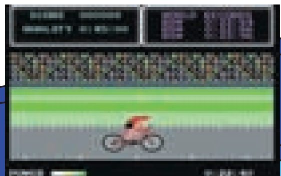
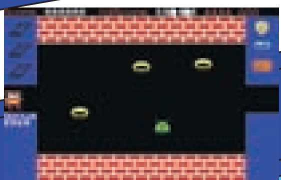
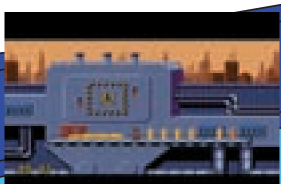


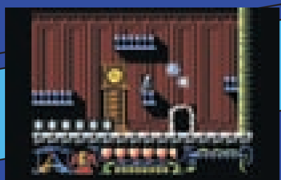




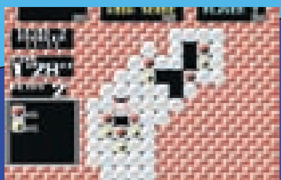



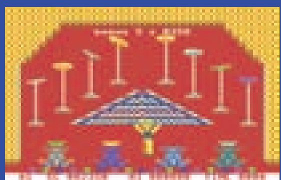


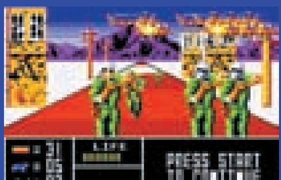




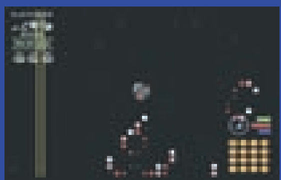
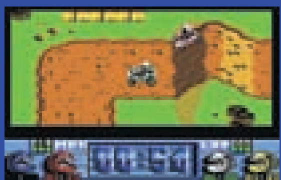












GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT

WE ATTEMPT TO REWRITE THE HISTORY BOOKS BY SALUTING THOSE CLASSIC GAMES THAT HAVE FALLEN BY THE WAYSIDE

NAM-1975

HOW DO YOU KNOW? YOU WEREN'T THERE, MAN!

Release: 1990
Format: Neo-Geo MVS/AES/CD
Publisher: SNK
Developer: In-House

If you're the kind of cynic that thinks the Neo-Geo is an overpriced console with way too many beat-'em-ups, allow us to change your blinkered view. First, many of its fighters are absolutely superb, and second, if you're prepared to do a little digging you'll find a plethora of genres on SNK's behemoth of a console.

Puzzlers, shmups and sports games – particularly baseball and football titles – are plentiful, but the Neo-Geo's ridiculous price tag (a new machine cost £500 even back in the Nineties) meant that few were able to enjoy its delights. Sadly, this hasn't changed in recent years and you'll see little change from £1,000 if you're after titles like the excellent *Metal Slug*. Fortunately, certain Neo-Geo titles can be picked up for less than £20 nowadays and one such gem is SNK's *Nam-1975*.

Debuting as a Neo-Geo launch title, *Nam-1975* was a nifty little shooter that played very much like a side-scrolling version of *Cabal* or *Blood Brothers*. Seeing you sent back to the Vietnam jungle to rescue Dr R Muckley, *Nam-1975* started off tough and continued to punish you.

As with *Cabal*, a cursor could be directed anywhere on the screen in order to take care of soldiers, tanks, jet fighters and anything else your opponent was prepared to throw at you. The downside to all this on-screen carnage was that your soldier couldn't move while he fired his gun, making him an easy target. Thus the average game of *Nam-1975* would see your seasoned grunt frantically dashing along the bottom of the screen, only stopping to unleash the occasional devastating barrage of fire.



▲ Horror of war? Look – it's hilarious. You just got blown out of the screen. Ho ho.



As with *Cabal*, defeated enemies would drop power-ups and points, and providing you were quick enough it was possible to arm your grunt with dual sights (making enemies much easier to hit), a rapid-fire machine gun and a superb flamethrower that belched forth a satisfying stream of fire. Grenades were also a staple part of your soldier's supplies and a well-placed metal egg could destroy tanks, down helicopters and even level buildings.

Later stages featured captured prisoners who'd join you once their captors had been killed, and they loyally stayed with you until you lost a life. And then, of course, there were the huge end-of-level bosses to worry about…

But perhaps the most notable aspect of *Nam-1975* was the humour that SNK had slyly woven into the game. While not as tongue in cheek or frequent as in the later *Metal Slug* series, it was easy to see where Nazca had found some of *Slug*'s inspiration. Shoot a falling parachutist on level three and the hapless soldier would hilariously plummet to his death. Similarly, should your soldier get hit by a grenade the resulting explosion would hurl him out of the screen. Sure, they were only little touches but they neatly juxtaposed the insane carnage that was playing out in front of you and provided some welcome light relief.

Even today *Nam-1975* remains an enjoyable experience and is a great introduction to the Neo-Geo's back catalogue. While it's by no means a graphically stunning title, it's still packed with a fair amount of detail and the visuals do improve as you progress deeper into the game.

If you're looking for an unadulterated gameplay experience but don't fancy re-mortgaging your house, *Nam-1975* is definitely the game for you.

CHUCK ROCK II: SON OF CHUCK

PAPA WAS A RETRO STONE

Release: 1993
Format: Various Home Systems
Publisher: Core Design
Developer: In-House

A diplodocus named Derek might not be your average videogame boss, but he certainly manages to make a sizeable impression when he appears for the first time in Core's superior caveman sequel.

After his dad gets kidnapped Chuck Jr braves the beautiful, multi-parallax scrolling jungle in order to rescue his beloved pops. Along the way he encounters cavemen with detachable wigs, troublesome pterodactyls and all sorts of other bizarre beasts. Nothing can prepare him for his meeting with Derek, though, and while the lumbering dino has a fairly straightforward attack pattern, he could still be a pain for the uninitiated.

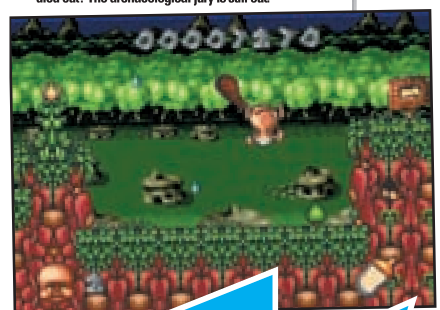
Arriving in a small clearing, two huge claws are the first warning of Derek's imminent appearance and Chuck Jr is trapped with nowhere to hide. Luckily, our hero is quite a resilient little fella and as soon as Derek reveals his long snaking neck and a girth that would put Bernard Manning to shame our little hero is ready for him.

Derek's head hypnotically weaves backwards and forwards and appears completely impervious to Junior's frantic club attacks. Then, without warning, Derek slams his head on the ground and he tries to chow down on his nappy-wearing foe.

But Junior is having none of it and sidesteps the dino's lunges. Poor old Derek not only receives a mouthful of dirt for his troubles but also takes a severe clubbing. As Chuck Jr's attack continues, plasters start to appear all over the dino's face and all the giant lizard can do is admit a miserable defeat, allowing our hero to continue his quest.



▲ Club-wielding delinquents – the reason dinosaurs died out? The archaeological jury is still out.



"THERE'S SOMETHING OUT THERE AND IT AIN'T NO GAME"

PREDATOR

Great RETRO Gaming Moments

▼ Yes it's blocky, but it's *tense, imminent death* blocky.



Release: 1987
Format: Various Home Systems
Publisher: Activision

It may have been based on a kick-ass Arnie flick, but *Predator* was one woeful piece of code. In fact, it came dangerously close to appearing in this month's Worse Licence Ever feature. So it's lucky we remembered its one redeeming feature and by golly it's a good 'un.

Picture the scene: your squad of marines had bravely (perhaps foolishly) set off into the blocky jungle eager for a firefight. Arnie stumbled after them – the animation really has to be seen to be believed – and quickly discovered that the jungle's literally crawling with enemies. Still, you're Arnie and the Austrian Oak isn't afraid of anything. Grenades at the ready and guns blazing you brutally tore apart anyone that got in your way, hoping that things would not only get better but justify your expensive purchase. But just as you were about to reach for the off switch something magical happened…

Suddenly the screen was awash with cold blues and reds and a conspicuous triangle started to track your movement. Panic quickly rising you thrust the joystick in whatever direction would get you away from those damn crosshairs… then you caught sight of what would be the first of many of your fallen buddies. Distracted by this turn of events – or perhaps your sweaty hand simply slipped from the stick – you were caught in the Predator's sights and immediately joined your fallen friend. The hunter had become the hunted…



Behind The Scenes

To many retro gamers, Eugene Jarvis is a god. After lighting up arcades with his astounding Defender, he returned with Stargate and the amazing Robotron: 2084, easily one of the most frenetic shooters ever made. Eager to learn more, Retro talks to Jarvis about one of his greatest creations…



Playing *Robotron: 2084* in its original arcade incarnation is an experience that stays with you forever. From the moment your credit registers and your hands rest upon the cabinet's twin joysticks, you know you're in for a treat. Get good at *Robotron* and you'll develop almost superhuman reflexes that allow you to duck and dive through waves of relentless enemies. It's an amazing sensation that has rarely been duplicated by any other shoot-'em-up – and you owe it all to Eugene Jarvis.

Considering he had ambitions to become a biochemist, it's strange that Jarvis moved into the games industry. After dabbling in computing at school he studied the subject at university, eventually landing a job creating pinball games for Atari. When Atari's pinball division shut down a few years later, Jarvis pitched up at Williams and became enamoured with the new videogames that were starting to appear, so he began work on his first game.

Defender appeared in 1980 and blew gamers away. After the uniformity of *Space Invaders*, *Defender* was like nothing else around. Ridiculously fast sprites, an intense control system and superbly balanced gameplay created a title that's still fantastic 25 years later. For many, though, it's *Robotron: 2084* that's the pinnacle of Jarvis' career and the game's reputation is thoroughly deserved. And it all came from a very simple idea…

"From a game design perspective, the set-up was to essentially take *Space Invaders* into two dimensions," says Jarvis of what he hoped to achieve with *Robotron*. "Instead of moving in a line fighting enemies coming from above, *Robotron* allowed you to move in full 2D space, with enemies coming from all sides and shooting in all directions at once. Take the challenge of *Space Invaders* and square it – that's what we set out to achieve with *Robotron*."

One idea that didn't get past the drawing-board stage would have made *Robotron* a fundamentally different game; rather than shooting Robotrons you would have had

Released: 1982
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Williams
Developer: Vid Kidz



▼ When you've had as many hits as Eugene Jarvis you can pull all the silly poses you want. Don't be fooled by his crazy antics though, he's a gaming god. Kneel down before him, puny mortal…

to guide them into electrodes. However, Jarvis isn't really known for pacifistic games and the idea was quickly – and wisely – dropped.

AI TO DIE FOR

With the inspiration in place it was time for Jarvis to put his ideas in motion. Collaborating with Larry DeMar (with whom he had already worked on *Defender* and *Stargate*), Jarvis had the core concept of *Robotron* up and running within three days; the game was completed in just six months. But development wasn't without its problems. "Our biggest challenge was technical and was about handling the massive quantities of enemies and particle effects," explains Jarvis. "We had what was one of the first graphics co-processor chips designed to help with the video throughput. It was a 1MHz graphics processor, and through very clever machine code and micro code we were able to handle about 150 enemies on screen at once – Larry and I nearly lost our minds making it work."

As if having that many enemies on screen wasn't enough to drive Jarvis and DeMar round the bend, the pair were determined to make sure they were smart opponents, and the game features an interesting array of AI routines: Grunts couldn't shoot and would try to overwhelm you with sheer numbers, while the nefarious Brains could fire Cruise Missiles that would follow you around the screen.

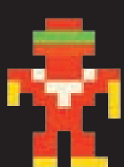
TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE

Developer Digital Eclipse is no stranger to *Robotron: 2084* having created several decent conversions of it over the years for various platforms. While our favourite version is easily the one that's currently available on the first *Midway Arcade Treasures* compilation, special mention has to go to the free online version available at www.shockwave.com/sw/content/robotron. Originally released in July 2000, this version came about after Midway commissioned Digital Eclipse to recreate ten of its most popular games in order to show off Shockwave's web content. While it plays fine with various joysticks, it's liable to seriously damage your health if you try playing with a keyboard. Having to control a plethora of different keys with each hand is an absolute nightmare and is no substitute for the original controls. Still, at least it isn't costing you anything…

"We had the Grunt finished in the first week," confirms Jarvis. "Its AI was to always seek the player on the shortest possible route and ignore anything else in its path. In all though, several weeks were spent tweaking each enemy with extensive play testing."

The AI was also remarkable for its spontaneity. "Virtually no behaviour in *Robotron* is deterministic," Jarvis explains. "There's always a random factor added to any behaviour for more interest. It's amazing how players will associate random events with mood or intelligence of enemies. We constantly want to make sense out of nonsense. We see the game as being pissed off or angry when there has just been a bad lot of random numbers drawn. Or we think we are 'on a roll', when merely we have gotten a lot of lucky random draws." To complement its exceptional AI, *Robotron* also featured a great difficulty curve. While the first few Waves were relatively simple the enemies soon started to swamp you and it became a real struggle to finish later levels. Jarvis attributes this success to continual playtesting. "That was the beauty of design in those early days," he explains. "Because we had *Robotron* up and running in its basic form we were able to play the game constantly throughout its development cycle. This contrasts to many complex games today that are often playable only in the final few weeks before their release.

"We also didn't have game testers, just ourselves, so there was a very tight design loop where the game could be refined very rapidly. I think we were also lucky that we were good but not great players, so we avoided the tendency by expert gamers to make things impossible for the average player – what was at the total top end of our skills







▲ Arcade legend Archer Maclean was so pleased when he heard about our *Robotron* feature he lent us pictures of his own personal cabinets. Cheers, mate.

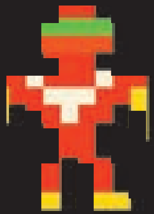
KNOW YOUR ENEMY

The key to understanding Robotron's baddies



SPHEROIDS

These circular foes drop Enforcers that rapidly pursue you with deadly guided missiles. They're extremely fast so be careful. In fact, just avoid them instead



GRUNTS

They don't shoot but instead try to overpower you en-masse. No matter how good you become at *Robotron*, a group of Grunts will always makes you nervous.

▼ A young Jarvis promotes *Narc*. Considering how great this original was, it's amazing that Midway got so many things wrong with last year's sequel.



▼ Eugene Jarvis and Larry DeMar proved an unstoppable combination and brought Vid Kidz great success.



was a great level for expert play, so *Robotron* was hard yet accessible to many players."

LOOKING GOOD

With all the AI and gameplay mechanics in place, it was simply a matter of continually improving *Robotron*'s aesthetics. Thanks to the speedy 1MHz graphics processor, everything was moving along at a dazzling rate; now it was time to define each character and add *Robotron*'s boisterous spot effects.

"It's funny," begins Jarvis. "To today's player *Robotron*'s graphics are laughably simplistic, but they were state of the art in 1982. The non-rotating, squarish, straight-on-view robots gave a very clean and aesthetic look – actually quite robotic, making the style very iconic. The sounds were all live computer synthesized effects of amazing depth. Pink and white noise, as well as FM, pulse width modulation and wave table synthesis were just a few of the techniques we used. Incredibly, the sound system was one monophonic channel, but by using a highly refined priority scheme where the most important event takes precedence, no-one ever noticed. Although most players still swear they hear several sounds at once…"

There's no denying that *Robotron*'s aesthetics and intense gameplay made it stand out, but as with Jarvis' previous titles, it was the unique control system that you first noticed. After Jarvis had finished work on *Stargate* he was involved in a car accident that shattered his right hand. At the time his favourite game was *Berzerk* and his injury made it practically impossible for him to play his beloved game.

"I loved *Berzerk* but it was very frustrating having to move towards an enemy you wanted to shoot, especially as holding the fire button down meant your player remained stationary," recalls Jarvis. "At that point I realised the solution was to fire with one joystick and move with another. It was such a basic idea that it was amazing it hadn't been done before. Today, of course, dual joysticks are standard on virtually all console systems."

It may have been a novel control system, but it was typical of the approach that Jarvis took towards his games, and as he explains, it's all about making them as intuitive as they can be. "I've always felt that controls are a key element to make the human-machine interface as natural and free as possible," he says. "If the player has to think too much about how he's going to do something, then the game is lost. Also, you want to empower the player with a control that allows incredible freedom of movement, yet is simple to use. Complete contradictions."

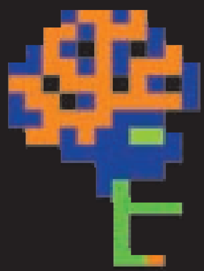
Contradictions aside, *Robotron* proved extremely successful when it was released in 1982 and, as with *Defender*, it attracted some seriously dedicated gamers. "You cannot play a casual game [of *Robotron*] as it demands your everything," says Jarvis. "You've got to survive… kill or be killed. The player's mind is cleansed of all distractions and *Robotron* takes over."

Despite this toughness there was plenty to draw players back. While Waves were completed by killing all the onscreen Robotrons the real points were amassed by consecutively collecting as many stranded humans as possible. This proved a challenge too, though. Did you try to collect that woman for 1,000 extra points, or were you content to finish off the remaining Robotrons? It's the perfect example of risk versus reward and proves that Jarvis' game wasn't just another shooter.

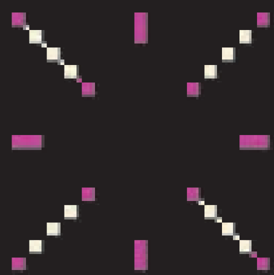
"That was a key element of *Robotron*'s design, and it kept the player in total cognitive dissonance at all times," confirms

"FROM A GAME DESIGN PERSPECTIVE THE SET-UP WITH ROBOTRON WAS TO ESSENTIALLY TAKE SPACE INVADERS INTO TWO DIMENSIONS"

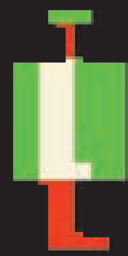




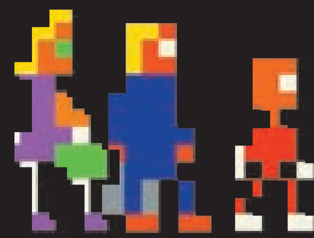
BRAINS
This gruesome-looking foe first appears on Wave 5 and fires deadly missiles. It can also turn downed humans into deadly Progs that race towards you at an alarming rate.



QUARKS
While the Spheroids are quite content to fire Enforcers at you, the Quarks go one better and launch deadly tanks that will fire bombs or try to run you over.



HULKS
These indestructible monstrosities unerringly track down any nearby humans and kill them. While you can't destroy them, they can be slowed with laser fire.



THE FAMILY
The last family on earth consists of Mommy, Daddy and Mikey. There are bloody thousands of them though, so collect as many pixel people as you can.

Jarvis. "At each millisecond the player must recalculate an optimal strategy evaluating the risk of dying versus the point gain of rescuing humans versus the value of killing off the enemy versus the value of fleeing and so on. This is what makes *Robotron* much more of a tactical and strategic game than merely a twitch-fest. Great *Robotron* players are able to intuit the best strategic decisions and execute them in real time."

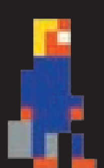
KEEP GOING

With the success of the original game it was inevitable that similar games would appear, and while 2D titles such as *Smash TV* managed to re-create some of *Robotron*'s original flair, the 3D variations were a different story… "The hardware limitations of early 3D systems handicapped a lot of pioneering efforts like *Robotron X*," admits Jarvis. "Besides, making a sequel of *Robotron* is like making a sequel of any great classic like *Tetris* or *Pac-Man*. The games are so perfect in their original 2D environments that in making the move to 3D the odds are that you're going to screw it up. An obvious choice would be to take the original game mechanic and execute it with 3D graphics but from the third-person perspective. This would look very modern but reserve the gameplay magic."

While Jarvis says that this is what

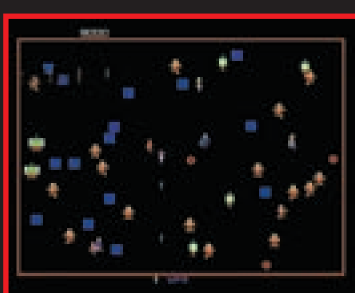
"YOU'VE GOT TO SURVIVE. KILL OR BE KILLED. THE PLAYER'S MIND IS CLEANSED OF ALL DISTRACTIONS AND ROBOTRON TAKES OVER"

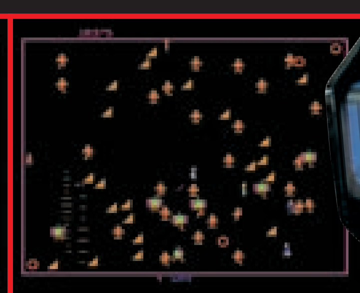
he tried to achieve with *Smash TV*, he acknowledges that it wasn't a "true sequel". So how would he go about making a follow-up to *Robotron*? "If I were to take up the sequel gauntlet, I would try to implement my original concept for the game, which was never actually finished," he says. "*Robotron* was originally envisioned as a massive underground world of corridors, control rooms, reprogramming rooms and robot factories. I never got around to realising this vision in the original game, since the randomly structured open playfield proved so much fun to play." Jarvis may never have made a *Robotron* sequel, but when the original game remains so good it scarcely



seems to matter. And although it's appeared on computers and compilations over the years, it's the recent Xbox version that Jarvis feels best captures the original game, but even he has reservations about it. "I like my joysticks nailed down to something heavy," he laughs. "If I play it too much I'll just end up ripping the controller apart…"

As if to prove Jarvis' preference for anchored joysticks, he's still working in the arcade industry, this time for his own company, Raw Thrills, Inc. In recent years it's produced games such as *The Fast And The Furious*, but you can bet that even if people are still playing those games in 25 years, *Robotron: 2084* will still be going strong 50 years after its release.





▼ Have you ever seen anything more beautiful than a *Robotron* cabinet? Once you've gripped those joysticks there's no going back…



Street Fighter III 3rd Strike

Greatest RETRO Game Ever

FORGET ABOUT ZANGIEF, GUILE AND BLANKA – NOW FIGHT A NEW RIVAL

Format: Arcade, Dreamcast
Release: 1997
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-House

Ask any gamer – nay, anyone at all – to name the quintessential 2D beat-'em-up and we'll wager that the majority will plump for *Street Fighter II*. It's a fair call – without the impact of Capcom's seminal fighter, the genre would arguably be in quite a state today. Imagine a world where *Mortal Kombat* is considered the definitive fighting series and you've got some idea of what we're getting at. Horrible, huh? But like *GoldenEye* is near unplayable by today's standards, *Street Fighter II* simply doesn't have the same allure and sheen that we still remember so vividly from some 15 years ago. There's just so much more potential for individuality and flair in more recent versions of the game. Allow us to digress.

From the front end, the home version of *3rd Strike* is clearly stripped down to the bare bones in terms of modes – while almost every other fighter was flaunting its Survival, Time Attack and Arrange modes, *3rd Strike* offered only Arcade and Versus play, with a pair of Training modes for working on the basics and parrying respectively. But that's all it needs. The quality and precision of the one-on-one action is virtually unrivalled to this day and while fighting the CPU can never faithfully recreate taking on a human opponent, *3rd Strike*'s AI is one of the closest things we've come across.

The real unsung hero of the game, though, is the System Direction option. It's a shame in some ways that the default settings are so easy to learn and work with but if there's anything you don't like about the game, chances are it can be altered or turned off entirely in these eight pages of in-depth options. In addition to the basic round time and life bar options, these extra variables let you set up parry timing, disable or enable various types of blocking or moves, and generally customise the game to your exact specifications. While fun and interesting to tweak, these often go untouched – after all, it's no use practising with Air Guard enabled then bottling it in competition play because your parrying isn't up to it.

Even the character roster seems somewhat refined. After the *Alpha* series sported 30-odd characters in its later outings, this high point of the *Street Fighter* series peaked at just 19 (a round 20 if you count mega-cheap final boss Gill). But this wasn't the real bone of contention. This came in the fact that while every other 2D *Street Fighter* had seen the appearance of many popular faces, Capcom saw fit to have just four familiar fighters return for *SFIII*. But as anyone who at least checked the move list before getting on their high horse could tell you, it was more a

▼ Parrying is one of the most rewarding elements in any game ever. Don't argue.



THE BALLAD OF DIRTY KEN

Despite its general quality, *3rd Strike* isn't without its problems. For the most part, these surround the returning characters – you only have to pop online in *Anniversary Collection* to see how many players refuse to look beyond the Shoto trio (Ryu, Ken and Akuma) and Chun-Li. Then again, you can't really blame them. Out of the four, dirty Ken and filthy Chun-Li are spectacularly poorly balanced. While most other characters balance power and speed wonderfully, these two miscreants have snaffled rather more than their fair share of each and the sickening superiority of many of their moves makes fighting against them rather a chore. One day, we hope people will realise how broken they are and challenge themselves to develop their Q or Necro skills instead of always visiting the House O' Cheap. We can dream, right?





▲ "One, two, the end!" said Dudley as he ruined Sean's face. Sean said nothing. He's a silly loser with no friends.



▲ Man in pants fights ugly freak – sounds a lot like WWE silliness to us…

cast post-makeover than an all-new set of warriors. Remy's Flash Kick, Sonic Boom and Double Sweep make him Charlie and Guile's successor, Necro's stretchy limbs and electricity suggest him to be the bastard love child of Dhalsim and Blanka, while everyone's favourite mask-wearing robot wannabe Q is an evolution of Balrog's charging antics. Only much, much cooler.

Even the choice of a single Super Art per battle isn't even close to the annoyance many nay-sayers make it out to be – quite the opposite, in fact. Every character and, indeed, player will be more vulnerable to a certain attack than another and it's up to you to work out which best suits your game based on your opponent (both pixelated and carbon-based forms) and your style of play.

But it's the wonderful parrying system that really sets *3rd Strike* apart. While SNK's 'Just Defend' system rewarded a late tap of away to guard (whether intentional or simply a little slow), Capcom flipped that 180° in one of the finest pieces of risk/reward gameplay ever. Players now had the choice to either guard against enemy attacks and, in the case of special and super moves, take a little chip damage per hit, or risk a parry (or 17) – only by tapping towards exactly as each hit of an attack connects can an entire string of blows be knocked away.

So why parry if it's so difficult? The rewards are three-fold. For one, a parried blow means your life bar goes untouched. Secondly, parrying the last (or only) hit of an attack gives you a fair window to launch one of your own and, finally, it's amazing to watch, commands much respect and will really make your opponent think about how they attack. For maximum kudos, there's the red parry to master: guard the first blow or two of a super (which are notoriously tricky to parry) and parry the last few hits for the same reward without quite the same risk. Oh, the options.

The chasm-like difference in quality between *Street Fighter II* and *3rd Strike* was made that much more apparent by the release of the *Anniversary Collection* for Xbox. With the two games side by side, it's amazing to see the evolution that has taken place – we'd never downplay the significance of *Street Fighter II* but the time has come for people to realise that the days of its dominance have long since passed. *Street Fighter* is dead – long live *Street Fighter*.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1997



AT THE MOVIES

George Lucas relieved himself all over many a childhood memory by 'polishing up' the *Star Wars* trilogy and releasing it in theatres across the world, complete with new bits that everyone hated. *Revenge Of The Sith* would be the last chance he had to redeem himself.



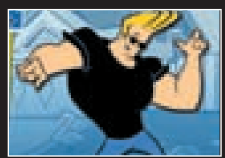
ON THE RADIO

Sean 'Puffy' Combs, aka Puff Daddy, took it upon himself to ruin The Police's *Every Breath You Take* and cash in on the death of Biggie Smalls this year. Still, at least he fell off his bike in the video. We still leave the first 30 seconds on just to enjoy his pain. Is that wrong?



TOP TOY

Since having a cat or dog is a lot of work, why not get a pet that runs on batteries? The Tamagotchi craze swept the nation this year and shops couldn't keep the little guys on the shelves for more than two minutes. Ours died in a mountain of its own mess in three days.



CARTOON HEROES

Oh mama! Brainless beefcake Johnny Bravo burst onto screens in '97 to a fond reception. Cartoon Network has since launched a slew of awesome new toons, although how it never snapped up the stunning *Invader Zim* is a mystery we demand solved. Any takers?



FASHION VICTIM

Got something to carry around that's slightly too big for your pockets? Why not get yourself a mini rucksack? These silly little things were all the rage, you know – the more novelty the backpack, the more respect garnered from the streets. Big pockets are way underrated.

Rising Sun Retro

16-bit consoles opened up a world of import gaming. With this in mind we'll be taking a look at some classics never released in the UK. This month we're cheating though, as Majikaru Hatto No Buttobi Taabou! Daibouken (roughly translated to Magical Flying Hat Turbo Adventure) was released here – the Japanese version is just miles better…



MAJIKARU HATTO NO BUTTOBI TAABOU! DAIBOUKEN

Release: 1990
Format: Mega Drive
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-House

Think of classic Mega Drive platformers and your mind may drift back to the likes of *Castle Of Illusion* and *Sonic The Hedgehog*. Unless you were an import nut, it's likely that you've never heard of *Magical Flying Hat Turbo Adventure* – let alone played it. A shame, as it's one of the Mega Drive's greatest platformers.

With similar play mechanics to the Master System's *Psycho Fox*, *Magical Flying Hat* combined bold visuals with ridiculously jaunty tunes. The end result was a delight that proved that Mega Drive games were more than capable of competing with *Mario*. Oh, and that nobody did weird like the Japanese, of course.

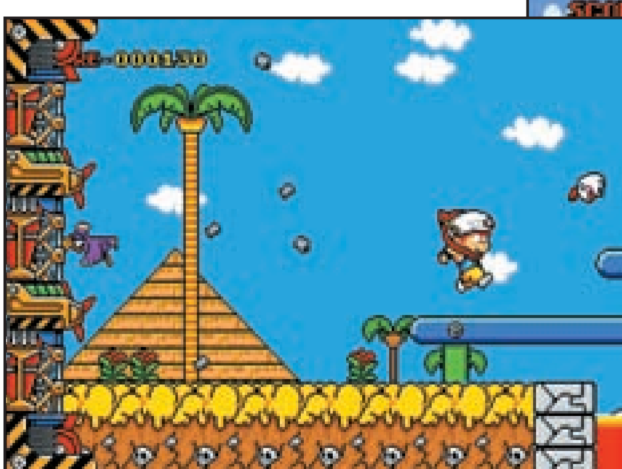
While your main character looked normal, the world he inhabited was anything but. Like *Psycho Fox* you could team up with a partner; but while Fox's sidekick was a cute bird, *Magical Hat* teamed you with an egg with feet. Bosses looked outrageous too – once you've seen a fox and robot monkey astride something that looks like Thunderbird 2, nothing will surprise you in a videogame again.

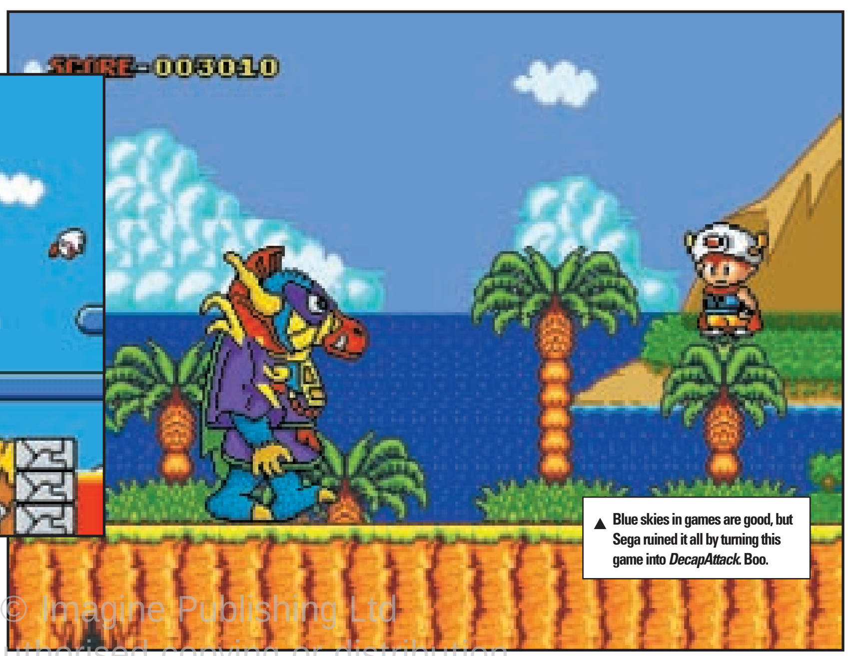
After his initial jump, your alter ego could flutter for short distances by shuffling his baggy trousers and wiggling his cape. The 'jump on the enemy to kill them' routine was present and correct and you could also take out enemies with a swift blow to the chops. A selection of pills would also grant you special abilities – these dubious-looking items were changed for conventional potions in the UK release. Taking a pill made it possible to freeze enemies, change the length and power of your punches or even morph into a giant mecha-monkey. While it was possible to race through a level in a matter of minutes the more dedicated gamer would explore every nook and cranny, and when the levels looked as beautiful as they did in *Magical Hat*, dawdling wasn't a hardship. The game's inspired design compelled you to complete each stage.

Despite looking cuter than a baby Ewok, Sega's game was tough, and working out the quickest route and learning which statues contained hidden monsters proved extremely beneficial. It was possible to avoid boss encounters altogether by retrieving a required item and then heading for the exit. If it proved too tough, Sega supplied a sneaky way of upping your life count. Certain levels contained bendy poles that your character could swing on – great for an extra lift, but jump on them correctly and you could net yourself up to 14 extra lives.

The only real disappointment is that Sega re-released *Magic Hat* in the UK and US as *DecapAttack*. While the level design and gameplay remained identical, Sega replaced the vibrant visuals with a sombre Halloween theme that didn't sit well with owners of *Magical Flying Hat*. Still, at least us British gamers actually got to play it this time…

▼ Some sections, such as this manic chase across the landscape, required plenty of co-ordination and practice.



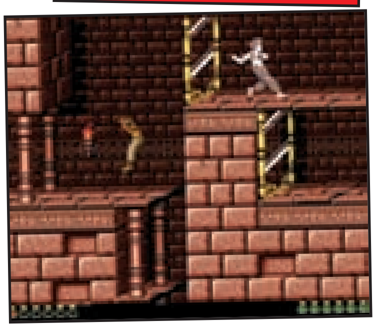


▲ Blue skies in games are good, but Sega ruined it all by turning this game into *DecapAttack*. Boo.

GREAT GAME BOSSES

THE MIRROR PRINCE – PRINCE OF PERSIA

Release: 1989
Format: Various Home Systems
Publisher: Broderbund
Developer: Jordan Mechner



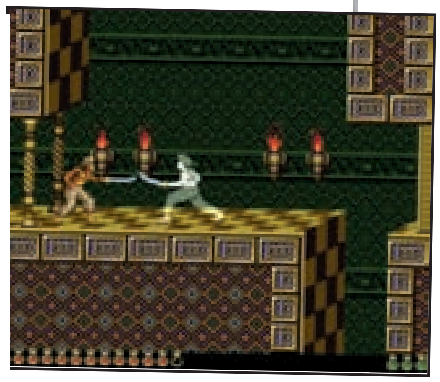
Alright, so perhaps many of you wouldn't exactly class the creation and then subsequent 'destruction' of the Prince's alter-ego as a boss fight in conventional terms. Even so, there really was nothing like it back in 1989 and it's one of those interesting ideas that you just can't forget playing for the first time.

At a certain point in the game (the level varies depending on which version of the game you're playing), you'll find yourself standing face to face with a large mirror. As it's the only thing between you and the exit leading to the next stage, you have to find a way through… but how?

Unfortunately, there's no way to smash it but if you take a good long run-up and leap towards the glass you'll pass straight through – creating a strange doppelganger and reducing your life to nearly zero in the process. A few seconds later and your double runs off, leaving you to carry on regardless.

Your reflection subsequently pops up to bother you a couple of times during the rest of your adventure (stepping on switches and drinking potions when you least expect it) until, finally, you come face to face with him.

Swords drawn, it's a fight to the death… or rather, both your deaths, considering every strike on him hurts you. The answer? Make love, not war – put your sword away and he does the same, leaving the doorway open for a blissful reunion. Honestly, you wouldn't believe how much hair we lost trying to work that one out…



▲ As ever, fighting isn't the answer. Put your sword away and walk away. He's not worth it…

WORST LICENCE EVER

Licensed games have a history of being at the lower end of the shoddy scale, but some manage to out-shoddy even the lamest and most tenuous titles…

REVOLUTION X

Release: 1994 ● **Format:** Arcade, Various Home Systems ● **Publisher:** Acclaim ● **Developer:** Midway (Arcade)

We like Aerosmith – really we do. But even our enjoyment of their Eighties/Nineties brand of poodle rock is marred by something like *Revolution X*, an absolute mess of a game proving that videogames and rock stars don't mix. The concept behind it is bad enough (rescue the kidnapped members of Aerosmith from the evil New Order Nation – which is led by leather dominatrix Helga – using music as your weapon… yeah, right) but when you realise that the only way to do this is to plough through the most arduous on-rails blaster imaginable, it all becomes a bit much.



▲ *Eat The Rich*? Shoot the developer, more like…

There's just so much wrong with it, it's hard to know where to begin. Maybe it's that all the enemies look the same, or that their animation is limited to only a handful of frames. It could be that you can't avoid being hit, even if you manage to fend off most of the enemies – there are just so many of them, you're guaranteed to die over and over. Multiple routes through levels that don't actually make any difference, stupidly unfair bosses, dire midi versions of Aerosmith hits like *Eat The Rich* and *Walk This Way*… everything about this game is absolutely atrocious. Exactly why Steven Tyler and friends agreed to put their names to this shambles isn't clear, but if we had a time machine then believe us, it'd be the first thing we'd go back and change.

Developer lookback

Raffaele Cecco is the king of the Spectrum shooters, no doubt about it. So when he disappeared from the gaming scene a few years ago, we made it our mission to find him and ask about his wonderful games until he was all out of answers…

RAFFAELE CECCO

Imagine you've just got home from work to find that a sheet of paper has been pushed through your letterbox. On the paper is a telephone number and a request to get in touch with a magazine you've never heard of that's been scribbled down by a neighbour – would you make that call? Luckily for us, curiosity got the better of Raffaele Cecco so he rang us up – if only to find out how the hell we'd managed to track him down…

Cecco should be well-known to retro gamers. He sprang onto the scene in the mid-Eighties thanks to the vibrant style of his games such as *Exolon*, *Cybernoid* and *Stormlord*. In the course of his 8-bit career his titles received numerous accolades (including three *Crash* Smashes and four *Amstrad Action* Master Game awards) and earned high praise from critics and gamers alike.

After working for a while in the 16-bit console and computer market Cecco decided that it was the right time to form his own studio and he launched King Of The Jungle in 1995. Sadly, the new venture was unable to match the glory of Cecco's 8- and 16-bit days and went bankrupt in 2003.

Since then Cecco has all but disappeared, which explains why we had to ring his neighbour to ask about getting that note through the legendary developer's door…

Retro: What's your earliest videogame experience?

Raffaele Cecco: We'd have to go way back in time to answer this one – more than 26 years I think. My memory is a bit hazy nowadays, but it was probably a Binatone Video Olympics 'games console' that featured various games based around *Pong* that we received with a TV set that my parents had rented. I was so fascinated by how this thing worked that I proceeded to dismantle it and ended up getting very confused by everything that was inside. Otherwise I remember playing lots of arcade games like *Space Invaders*, *Phoenix* and *Defender* in the local kebab shops near my school, and finally getting an Atari VCS one Christmas. I was in absolute heaven when it arrived.

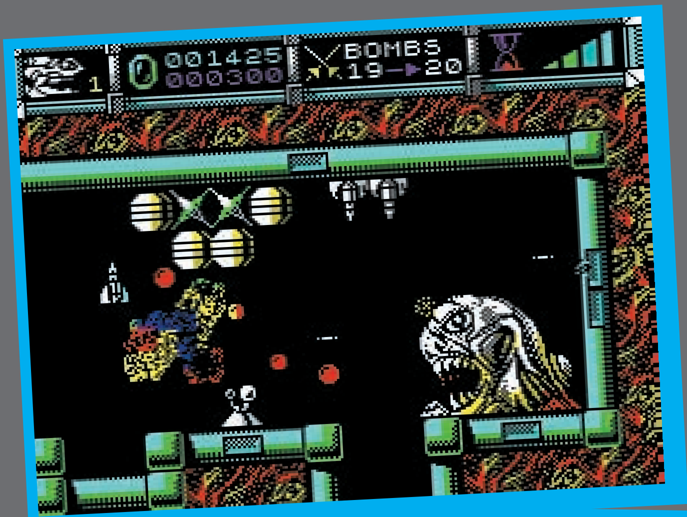
R: When did you realise that you wanted to create games?

RC: It was when I was about 13 and my parents bought me a Sinclair ZX81. I remember constantly pestering them for it and having to wait ages for the thing to actually arrive. It eventually





▲ Mr Cecco – as he was at the height of his fame, and now looking like… well, a fairly normal guy really.





▲ *Cybernoid* made a star out of Cecco, although it wasn't the only ace up his sleeve…

came, along with a good book about programming in BASIC, and I was absolutely hooked. I wrote a very simple game where you moved left and right and had to avoid lots of asterisks that dropped downwards. Sadly, I could never save my work because the tape loading was so unreliable.

R: Were your parents worried that you joined the industry at such a young age?

RC: I don't think so. I got offered my first job when I was 17 and they were very pleased for me. It did mean that I had to leave home, though. I was living in north London at the time and the company, Mikro-Gen, was based in Ashford in Surrey, so it was too much of a slog to travel there every day. Obviously, my parents were sad to see me go, but pleased I was doing something that I loved.

R: Tell us more about joining Mikro-Gen.

RC: Well, I'd sent a couple of graphics demos out to both Dalali Software and Mikro-Gen and, luckily, both companies offered me jobs. I eventually decided to go with Mikro-Gen as it had already had a couple of hit games including *Automania* and *Everyone's A Wally*. There were also some really excellent people working there that I could (and did) learn a lot from, so it was a very wise move.

R: You've worked with Nick 'Captain of Coding' Jones on many games. How did your relationship come about?

RC: Nick started work at Mikro-Gen just before I did and we became good friends. It seemed natural to carry on working together after we left Mikro-Gen, and Nick did several excellent conversions of my Spectrum games for the C64. We kept in touch for a while after Nick left for the USA to work at Shiny with David Perry (also ex-Mikro-Gen), and we met up a few times. Unfortunately, we've now lost touch, but I'm sure we can track each other down again.

R: What was it like moving to Hewson?

RC: I initially approached them with a demo for *Exolon* after I left Mikro-Gen. They were very keen, and they gave me a freelance contract in order to finish it. I never worked from their offices but I certainly enjoyed creating games for them at home even though ▶

CYBERNOID

Cybernoid (1987) was Cecco's first *Crash* Smash and played like a cross between the classic *Thrust* and a standard shooter. By using a flick-screen approach, Cecco was able to create an interesting balance between frantic, all-out blasting and head-scratching puzzles. While Nick Jones took care of programming the Commodore 64 version, Cecco would always take care of the Amstrad conversions.

"It took me just two days to convert the Spectrum code to work on the Amstrad CPC, which also included me having to redraw all the graphics," recalls Cecco. "I remember being utterly exhausted after that. Sadly, the Amstrad conversions of my games were always an unwelcome but necessary milestone at the end of a Spectrum project."

They may have been unwelcome, but Cecco certainly made sure they weren't bog-standard ports, and every Amstrad title he worked on was significantly superior to its (already impressive) Spectrum counterpart.



"AMSTRAD CONVERSIONS OF MY GAMES WERE AN UNWELCOME MILESTONE"

EXOLON



Cecco's fascination with sci-fi emerged again in the superb but tough *Exolon* (1987), which became his second *Crash* Smash. This time, the player took control of a soldier who had to negotiate his way through some extremely unforgiving terrain and as with *Cybernoid* the game featured gorgeous visuals, was pixel-perfect and had sections that could be frustrating beyond belief.

"I was running short of time on *Exolon* and still had a few levels to create," recalls Cecco. "I vaguely recollect taking one of the-early levels and flipping it left-to-right in order to create a new one. Fortunately, I don't think anybody noticed."

Design short-cuts aside, *Exolon* proved to be another huge hit for Cecco and it was rather surprising when Hewson never announced a sequel. "To be honest, I don't think the scope for a sequel was as wide as *Cybernoid*s," says Cecco. "*Exolon* was a much simpler game, and a sequel would have been harder to vary from the original."







▼ *Deliverance* took the ideas of Stormlord one step further – no wonder it's loved by the fans.

▶ the financial rewards were never, shall we say, completely fulfilled… They had some good, friendly people there as well including the excellent programmer Dominic Robinson who coded *Zynaps*.

R: You must have felt pretty pleased with the accolades that *Cybernoid* received

RC: Oh, I was very happy. It was quite surreal walking round WH Smiths and seeing my game all over the front cover of so many magazines. I'd worked really hard on that project and it was great having that hard work finally appreciated by others.

R: Was there much pressure from Hewson while you were working on *Cybernoid 2*?

RC: There was always pressure from Hewson! *Cybernoid* had been such a success that it made perfect sense to do a sequel. Of course, it was similar but for me it certainly wasn't a cash-in. From a purely creative and technical point of view it was an opportunity to expand upon the original technology and concept.

R: *Exolon* was yet another deserved *Crash* Smash. Did the fame ever go to your head?

RC: Having your work acclaimed certainly gives you professional self-confidence, but I'd like to think that it didn't go to my head. At the end of the day I was a programmer and a games designer, not a rock star or movie star. I think instances where attempts have been made to portray individuals in the games industry as such have been pretty ridiculous. I remember a phase where any magazine article about developers featured photos of them wearing dark shades, desperately trying to look cool. Very funny! These days any successful game is a big team effort, and I think it's unfair that there are so many unsung heroes working hard behind the scenes.

R: Many of your games feature a science-fiction theme – any particular reason?

RC: Not really. When I was younger I'd read the odd Asimov and watched all the camp sci-fi TV programmes like *Battlestar Galactica* and *Buck Rogers*, but I was never a huge fan. From a games design perspective, sci-fi is simply an easy option because there are no limits to what you can do. Fundamentally, arcade games stripped to their bare bones are about geometric shapes and how they interact physically. If those shapes don't behave in normal,

"I ADMIRE THE TENACITY OF ANYONE WHO MANAGED TO FINISH ONE OF MY GAMES"

everyday ways they just paint them with some sci-fi elements and it all makes sense.

R: Was this one of the reasons why *Stormlord* was such a big departure from your previous games?

RC: I wanted to move away from the hardcore sci-fi stuff and do something more pretty and fantasy-like. I can't say I'm a big fan, but Tolkien, *Midsummer Night's Dream* and so on definitely influenced me. I'd love to see this kind of theme used in a game for the next gen – imagine how gorgeous and magical it could look.

R: Did *Stormlord*'s half-naked fairies cause any problems?

RC: Hewson liked the fairies (we all like naked fairies, right?), but I was asked to remove a very subtle but highly suggestive animation on the main title screen. Those fairies were a pain to draw because I couldn't get the legs looking right. The breasts were perfect, but the lower part of the legs looked absolutely awful, so in the end I just gave up and stuck her in a pot!

R: Your games are generally regarded as having gorgeous visuals but being rather tough to play. Was it always your intention to make them such a challenge?

RC: In those days, the term 'learning curve' didn't really exist for me. I did most of the playtesting myself, which meant that over several months I became completely desensitised to how hard they actually were. I assumed because I found the game easy enough, other people would too. I was wrong! I apologise for making people pull their hair out playing my games, and I admire the tenacity of anyone who managed to finish them!

R: Have you had a chance to look at the remakes of your classic games over at www.retrospec.sgn.net?

RC: I've looked at the remakes and I'm very flattered that somebody has actually spent the time and effort to reproduce my games. It's nice seeing them with more up to date graphics and sound. I must say revisiting my games after all these years really does show me how hard I made them. I had problems getting past the first two screens of *Cybernoid 2*!

R: How did you find working on *Licence To Kill*?

RC: Well, I did *Licence To Kill* as a freelancer for Domark and it was purely conversion work from the 16-bit versions. Sadly, I didn't have any involvement with the film company but I did get an early look at the film at Pinewood Studios, which was pretty exciting at the time.

R: *Solomon's Key* was the only arcade conversion you worked on for the 8-bit machines. Was it tough trying to cram the entire arcade game into a humble 8-bit computer?

RC: No, but it was certainly tough trying to cram an entire arcade machine into my living room! I had no source code to work from, just this behemoth of an arcade machine looming over me as I worked. I had to literally play the game from end to end, taking notes and making diagrams as I did so. Needless to say, I became rather good at it – thank God it was on free play.

R: So how do you feel about emulation? Do you have a problem with your games being available on sites like World Of Spectrum?

RC: I don't see it as a problem at all, as I don't actually own the rights to my early games; the rights stayed ▶

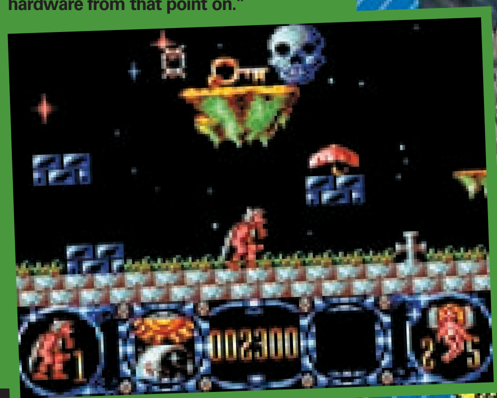


▼ The world of *Stormlord* was vivid and detailed, making the game really stand out. Mmm, fairies.

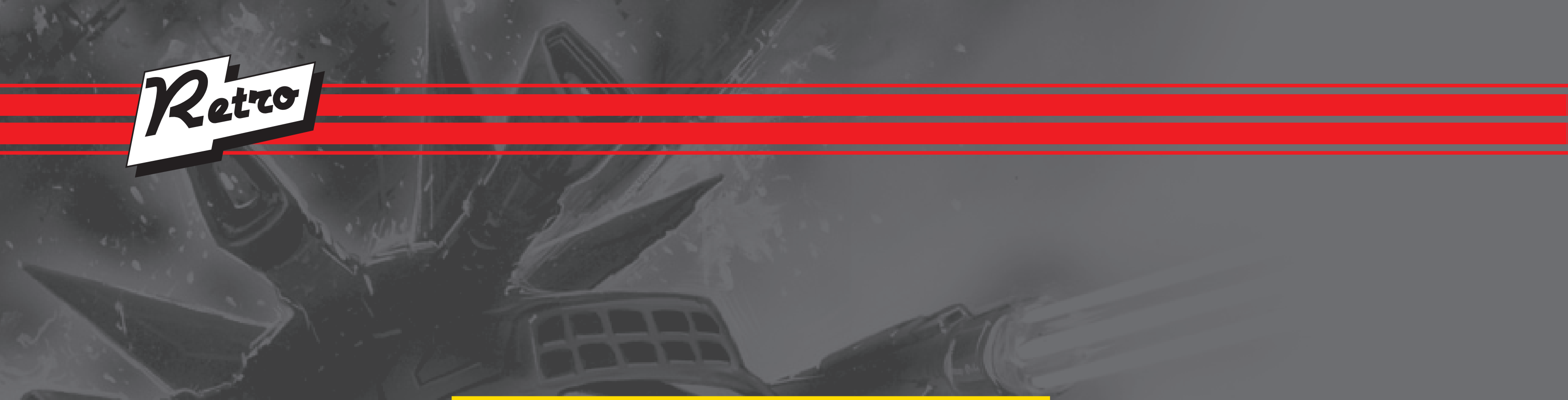
STORMLORD

Stormlord **(1989) and its sequel *Deliverance* were a huge departure for Cecco in terms of aesthetics, but still featured the same pixel-perfect timing and solid level design that had made the programmer's name. *Stormlord* also had a lot more depth than his previous work, and your main character was able to use various objects in order to solve simple puzzles (think *Dizzy* but with none of the annoying somersaulting). But while *Stormlord*'s production went relatively smoothly it wasn't without problems…**

"I remember struggling with a random crash bug and had spent about three days trying to track it down," explains Cecco. "This was really bad news for me, as I normally sorted out bugs within a day. It turned out to be a faulty power supply that would reset the Spectrum whenever it got too hot. Needless to say, I wasn't pleased, and learnt not to blindly trust hardware from that point on."







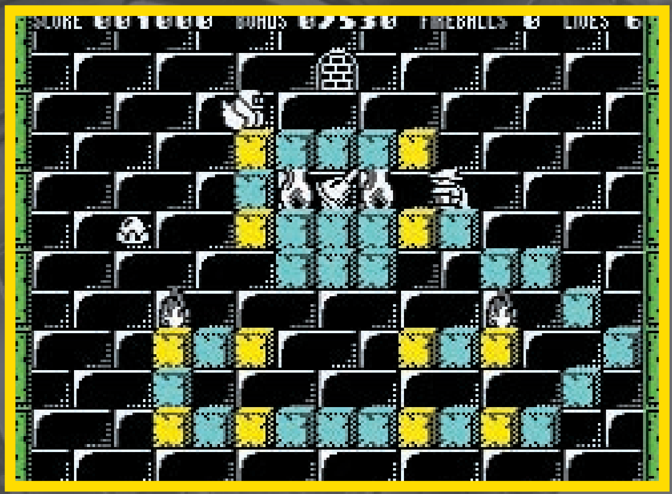
with the publishers at the time – I was very young, naïve and didn't get legal advice. You live and learn.

I could probably apply for some kind of retrospective rights for my original titles, as I was the author, designer and programmer. I don't see the point now though, as they are remembered as my games regardless of the publishers, and I don't think there is much money in emulated Spectrum games. I think emulation in general is fine as long as no-one is actually losing income. Certainly, I think something like MAME is actually an important historical and cultural archive, as it would be a travesty to lose all those old games.

R: How did you find the jump from 8- to 16-bit machines?

RC: It was actually very easy. Any new hardware poses initial problems and a steep learning curve, but you had more memory, faster processors and better graphics. Of course, to get the best out of the 16-bits you still had to use lots of tricks. Both 8- and 16-bit machines were a pleasure to work with, though, as you were dealing directly with the hardware in assembly language or machine code. There were no high-level languages like C++, libraries or other bumf – just you and the hardware.

R: Where did the inspiration for *First* and *Second Samurai* come from?



R: The original idea came from a samurai comic, whose name evades me now, but was about ronin warriors avenging their master's death. There was an artist who was supposed to be designing the levels but he just couldn't get the gist of designing playable maps, so it was left to me at the end, along with the coding. Even though I was designing the levels, this was the first project where I wasn't creating the actual graphics. I'm not an artist and the limitations of my graphics drawing talents had been reached with the 8-bit machines really.

R: So which of your games would you like to see updated for the current generation?

RC: All of them, of course! I'd be especially interested to see if a pixel-perfect game like *Cybernoid* would work, though, as I'm not sure if you could get that accuracy or awareness of your surroundings in a 3D environment. Games like *Exolon* and *Cop-out* would simply end up as first-person shooters, as would *Stormlord*, but with thunderbolts instead of bullets.

To be honest, though, I think many 8- and 16-bit games worked so well in 2D they are best left alone. You couldn't charge £30 for them, but they'd work very nicely as a compilation.

R: So which Raff Cecco game would you say best sums up Raff Cecco?

RC: Of my own titles I'd probably say *Cybernoid*, as it was the combination of frantic action, colourful graphics, big explosions and sneakily designed levels that became my trademark for a while.

R: How did you come to set up King Of The Jungle? Was it an easy process?

RC: I'd been working on a freelance basis for a company called Vivid Image for quite a few years and had worked on *First* and *Second Samurai* and created the concept for a racing game on the Super Nintendo called *Street Racer*. Initially, Nick Jones started work on *Street Racer* but left very early on when he was offered a job opportunity at Shiny in the USA. Naturally he took the job, but courteously 'broke in' new recruits, ex-Domark twins Chris and Tony West. They were car mad (as well as being an excellent programming and art team) so the *Street Racer* concept was perfect for them. Around the same time Stephane Koenig joined as a producer.

The four of us got on really well, especially Steph and myself, and *Street Racer* was a great success for Vivid Image, getting excellent reviews and selling loads. I'd been getting itchy feet for a while and thought it was the perfect opportunity to break away with the three other guys and

EQUINOX

***E**quinox* (1986) was one of Cecco's earliest titles but it's obvious that it became the perfect springboard for *Cybernoid*. Many of *Cybernoid*'s elements are strikingly similar to those seen in *Equinox* and it also marked Cecco's first collaboration with Nick Jones.

Taking control of a disposal droid you had to negotiate a series of tricky screens – notice a pattern here? – in search of radioactive canisters. Cecco has fond memories of the game and puts its success down to Chris Hinsley. "All the guys [at Mikro-Gen] learnt a lot from Chris," he says. "He was a brilliant programmer and games designer and really took me under his wing. I learnt a hell of a lot under his supervision."

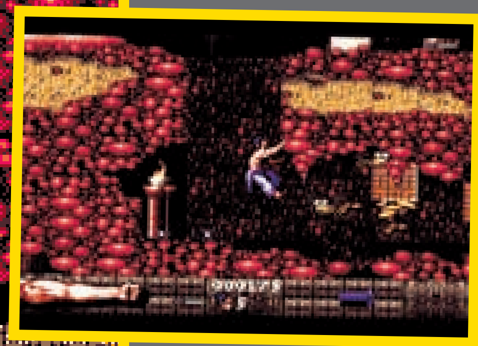
The other aspect of *Equinox* that Cecco remembers is the sheer amount of work that went into its six-month development. "Games programmers in those days were certainly renaissance men, drawing their own graphics and creating their own sound effects," explains Cecco. "I even remember writing the blurb on the back of the box. Basically the game was a nice and simple arcade/puzzle type of thing, and we simply bolted the story on afterwards."



▼ Even Cecco's first game, *Equinox*, managed to catch the eye of the appreciating Amstrad owner.



▼ If there was ever an Amiga game that was under-appreciated, it'd have to be *First Samurai*.



"IN RETROSPECT, THE BIGGEST MISTAKE WE MADE WAS MAKING ORIGINAL GAMES"

start our own company. Basically, we walked into Virgin Interactive with our track history and walked out with a £1 million deal.

R: Where did the company's name come from?

RC: The name King Of The Jungle came from an idea I'd had for a beat-em-up based around different animals. The game never saw the light of day but I thought it would make a great company name. Interestingly enough, we had to get permission from Prince Charles' solicitor to use the word 'king'. They do some checks to make sure you're not a porn company or doing anything dodgy.

R: Were you pleased with the games that King Of The Jungle created?

RC: Certainly some were better than the others, but we worked hard and finished all of our titles. I was very pleased with *B-Movie (Invasion From Beyond Abroad)* as it was different – manically fast with a nice splash of humour thrown in. We finished it on time and it reviewed well. Towards the end, the industry was becoming difficult and the option to do original work was becoming scarcer, so we took on less glamorous projects like *Galaga – Destination Earth* and *Championship Manager Quiz*; I was just pleased the company was being supported.

Ironically, the game I was most proud of was a playable demo codenamed *Explosion Royale* that I had put together over a couple of months with our brilliant creative director Joe Myers (now at Kuju). It looked fantastic, with great physics, vehicles and weapons. Unfortunately, King Of The Jungle closed before we could place it with a publisher.

R: What can you tell us about King of the Jungle's demise?

RC: Ha! How many pages have you got? It was a mixture of inexperienced management, egos and a very difficult time in the industry, as well as publishers letting us down (slow payments and so on). In the end, we had a fantastic demo but no publisher was interested. Many publishers were having a hard time and couldn't take a risk on an original product no matter how good it looked.

In retrospect, the biggest mistake we made was making original games. We should have established a reputation doing licensed products and sequels. Small developers doing original titles have been decimated in the UK, and I admire those that have managed to survive.

R: What did you do after King Of The Jungle closed?

RC: After King Of The Jungle closed, Stephane Koenig and myself bought back the rights to *Groove Rider* from the liquidator as it was practically finished. We completed it and had it published by Play It, so that kept us occupied for a little while. After that, Steph left for a job in the US, leaving me to ponder on what I wanted to do next. At the same time, my daughter was born and, frankly, I needed a break from the games industry after 20 years.

Suitably refreshed, I decided that the games industry wasn't for me any more, as I'd actually stopped playing games. I did a lot of research into web technologies, e-commerce, and the internet in general and concluded that the internet needed a way for the average person to produce amazing web content that goes way beyond what they can currently do with the usual picture albums and blogs. The end result is a project called mypinboard.com, and I invite everyone to check it out at www.mypinboard.com.

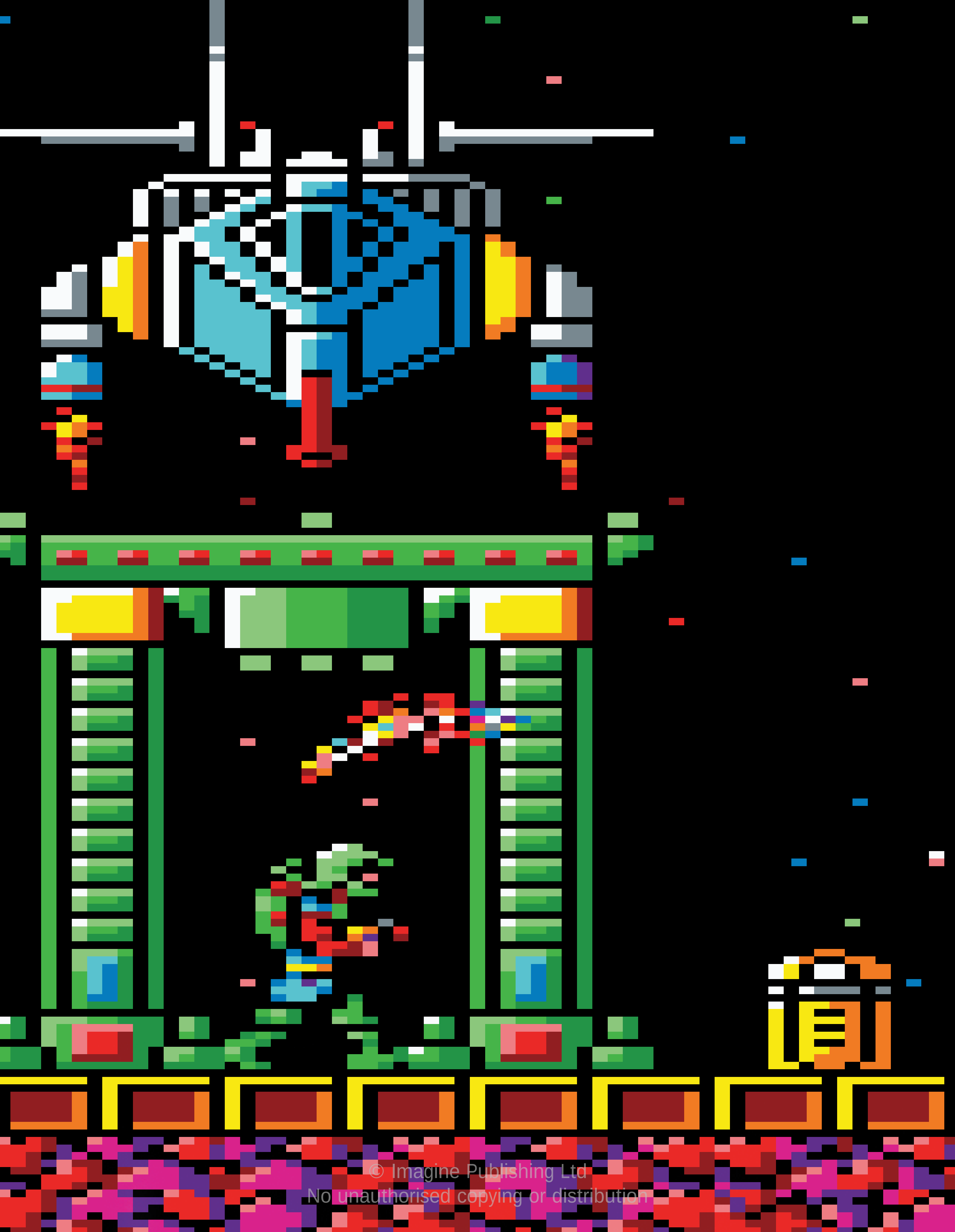
R: What are your plans for the future?

RC: Well, I still love programming or designing software and my company will continue developing mypinboard.com to become the de facto popular choice for creating amazing web content. The web is still a 'wild frontier', as far as technology and ideas go, similar to the way the games industry felt 20 years ago. Add an instant potential market of nearly a billion users, lower cost development with no middlemen, and you can see why it's so attractive to me.

R: So no return to the games industry then?

RC: I had a great time in the past and worked with some extremely talented, creative and clever individuals, but as far as the games industry is concerned, I think I'll be resting on my (very old) laurels. Some of the new games hardware like PS3 is stunning and I'll be very interested to see what people create for it. You never know, I might start playing games again…







Missiles away! **Exolon – Amstrad [Hewson] 1987**

CLASH OF THE TITANS

R•A•S•T•A•N

As gaming infiltrated the home market a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre, machine or even developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all that opposed him. First recorded in playgrounds in the early Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine, or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month we take a look at Taito's scrolling hack 'n' slash, *Rastan*.

ROUND 1: VISUALS

COMMODORE 64: The C64 version of *Rastan* is a bit of a love/hate affair. While we're impressed with the well-drawn sprites and decent animation, it's let down by some very slow scrolling that kills the pace of the gameplay. It's also rather chunky looking, but this suits the game. Add some decent backgrounds and the C64 is off to a good start.

SPECTRUM: We're pleasantly surprised by the Spectrum 128 conversion of *Rastan*. All the sprites are nice and big and are extremely similar to the original arcade creations. Granted, the sprites don't actually feature any colour (everything simply takes on the colour of whatever background it's moving past) but this is still a very strong effort.

AMSTRAD: While the sprites are recognisable, the simple backgrounds are a real disappointment and make *Rastan* look very basic. On the other hand, the lack of detail means everything scrolls at a cracking pace and it runs rings around the laboured C64 effort. It's a close call but the C64 wins.

WINNER: C64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

ROUND 2: AUDIO

COMMODORE 64: Martin Galway did an excellent job with the C64's SID chip, so *Rastan* sounds very nice indeed. While the ambient title music is worth a couple of listens, it's the tune that runs during the game that truly impresses. Bold and brash, it perfectly captures the on-screen action.

SPECTRUM: Not only is there a reasonably faithful rendition of the arcade music on the title screen, it continues throughout the main game (on the 128k version, at least). Granted, it's not going to give the C64 any sleepless nights, but it's a hell of a lot better than the Amstrad effort and won't have you reaching for the volume control. Second place, then..

AMSTRAD: Well, you get a decent tune at the beginning of the game, but after that everything goes downhill. There's no music at all while you're playing the game and the infrequent spot effects are pathetic. Considering the Amstrad's visuals are pretty good, it's a shame that the music is so poor.

WINNER: C64
RUNNER UP: SPECTRUM

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

COMMODORE 64: Despite some excellent aesthetics, the C64 is let down by sluggish scrolling that takes the sheen off this great hack 'n' slash title. It's a shame, as everything else makes the grade; controls are very responsive, jumping gaps is never a problem and everything is pretty much faithful to the original.

SPECTRUM: It may look and sound rather nice, but playing *Rastan* on the Spectrum is quite a painful experience, mainly due to its unresponsive and clunky controls. It's very easy to mistime jumps, and certain moves like the downward slash are practically impossible to pull off. It may be a bit of a looker, but the Spectrum version doesn't have all the moves.

AMSTRAD: The Amstrad version is a slick mover, but it's hampered by its control system. Unlike the others, this outing uses a separate button to jump. This may be like the arcade version, but you'll yearn for a simpler system.

WINNER: C64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

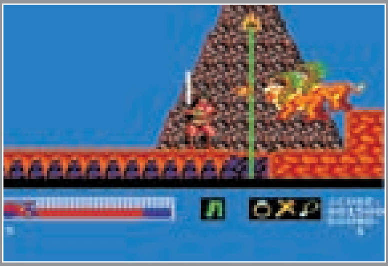
AND THE WINNER IS...

C64

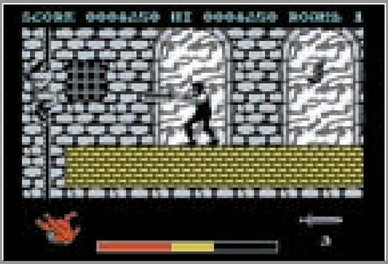
Okay, so it's slightly slower compared to its 8-bit counterparts, but everything else is perfectly acceptable. Superb music, impressive visuals and some wonderfully tight gameplay mean that *Rastan* on the C64 is this month's deserved winner. Yet another triumph for the wonder machine.

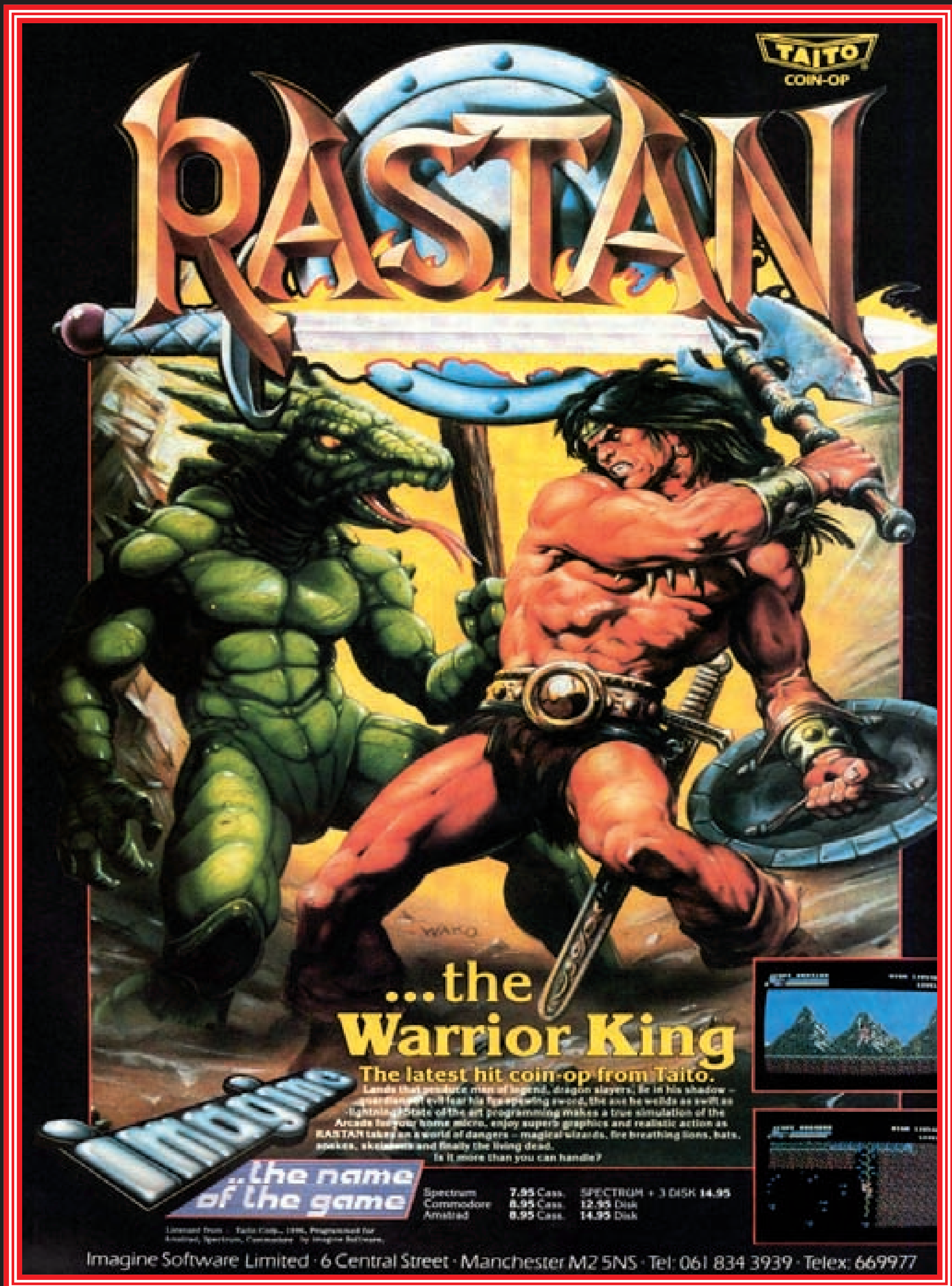


Congratulations to C64 *Rastan*, which triumphs this month.



Ya-boo to the Spectrum version (below) which makes us sad.





RASTAN (Various Home Systems) Imagine, 1988 – UK advertisement

SHOOTING STARS

JUMP INTO YOUR HIDEOUSLY TOOLED-UP SPACESHIP AND JOIN US AS WE LOOK AT THE FINEST SHOOT-'EM-UPS ON SEGA'S SATURN

Retro Feature

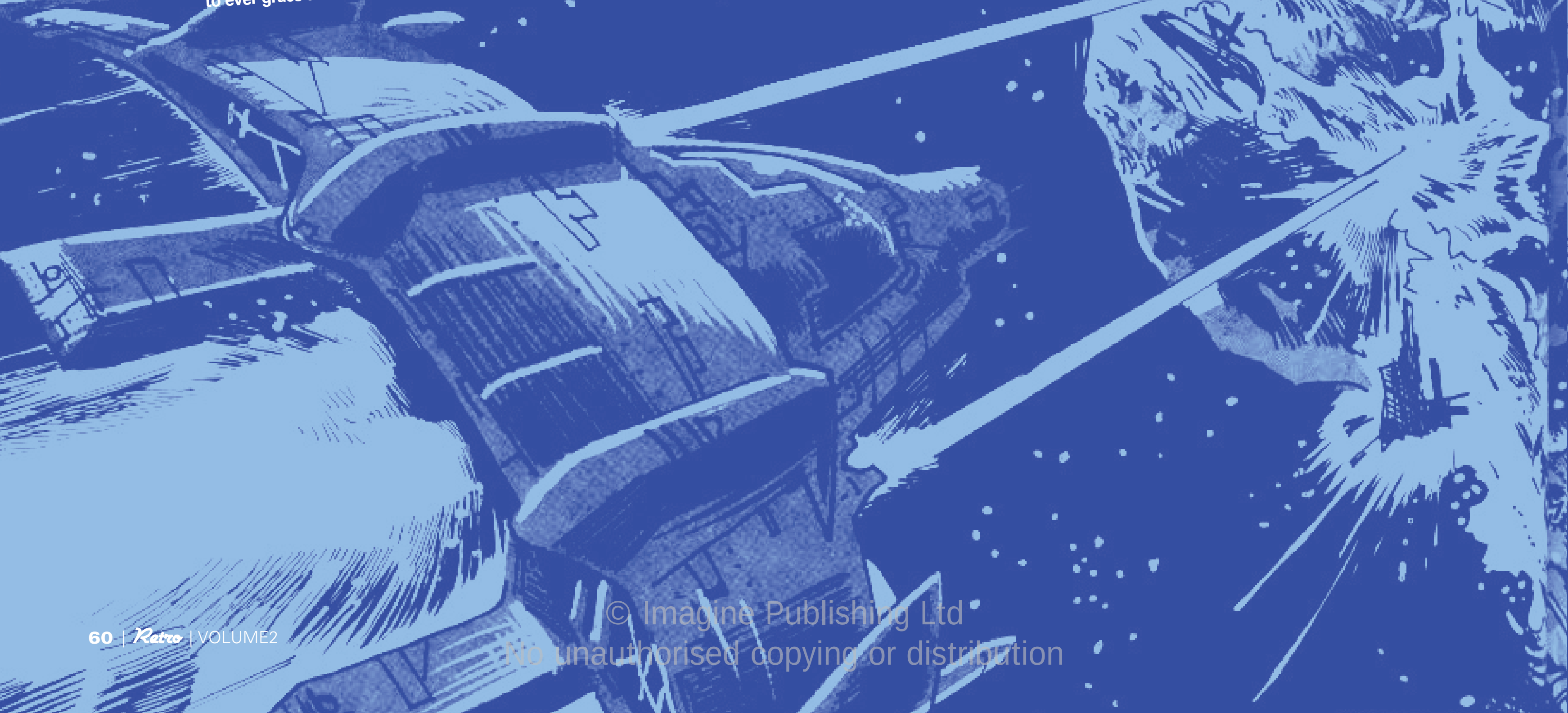
You have to feel sorry for Sega's Saturn. It's got something of a tarnished history and is often regarded as a failure by many of today's gamers. Sure, Sega's machine was difficult to program for, but developers like Team Andromeda and Capcom proved what it was capable of as long as it was in the right hands.

While the Saturn never really struck a chord with gamers in the west, over in Japan it was a different matter entirely, mostly because the Saturn was home to some of the greatest shooters to ever grace a home console. Although the PC Engine also proved to be a shooter's dream (check out the ridiculous prices that the Super CD-ROM title *Sapphire* currently goes for) it's the Saturn that most hardcore shmuppers regard as the superior system.

Thanks to Sega's ST-V Titan arcade board, titles like *Radiant Silvergun, Cotton Boomerang* and *Soukyugurentai* were incredibly easy to port and the console's enhanced sprite capabilities soon made short work of the many other shoot-'em-ups that were successfully ported over to the Sega Saturn.

Over 50 shooters were released for Sega's machine and many now go for ridiculously high prices. Titles like *Radiant Silvergun* still sell north of the £100 mark, with the likes of *Hyper Duel, Sengoku Blade* and *Battle Garegga* following not too far behind. The budding collector needs to know just how much they can expect to pay for these sought-after titles, and, more importantly, if they're actually worth the money.

With this in mind, we take a look at some of the better (and more unusual) shooters available for one of Sega's greatest consoles and find out just how good they really are…





BATSUGAN

Year: 1996
Developer: Toaplan
Rarity: 8/10
Estimated Price: £50-£70

Toaplan's last arcade shooter has been converted superbly to the Saturn, capturing all the madness and brilliance of the original game. It also laid down the groundwork for Cave's superb shooters such as *Donpachi* and *ESP Ra.De.* (Cave chief programmer, Tsuneki Ikeda worked on *Batsugan*) .

Although the visuals aren't as impressive as some of the other shooters here, they get better as the game progresses. Sound is likewise okay with the re-arranged soundtrack in Saturn mode sounding a lot stronger than its arcade parent.

What really makes *Batsugan* stand out is its hectic gameplay. Although the screen gets swamped with bullets it's relatively easy to stay in one piece thanks to your ship's tiny hitbox. As you defeat enemies you're given experience points; once you amass a certain amount your ship's firepower increases. Survive long enough and you'll be spewing out almost as much firepower as your enemies.

It's tricky to find and fetches a strong price on eBay, but it's worth it.

SOUKYUGURENTAI

Year: 1997
Developer: Raizing
Rarity: 5/10
Estimated Price: £30-£50

For those cynics who scoff at Electronic Arts' 'casual' credentials, you may be surprised to learn that *Soukyugurentai* and *Battle Garegga* were published by EA in Japan. EA certainly knew what it was doing, as both shmups are superb and worthy of any Saturn owner's collection.

It's *Soukyugurentai* (known as *Terra Diver* in US arcades) that we're interested in now, and if you're looking for a rock hard introduction to the world of Saturn shooters, you've come to the right place. Insanely difficult at times, *Soukyugurentai* has some of the greatest explosions ever seen and is complemented by some fantastic gameplay.

Originally released on Sega's ST-V Titan cartridge system, this was a vertically scrolling shooter on a horizontally oriented monitor. As in the excellent *Layer Section*, holding down the fire button released a web in front of your ship that would lock down on anything in front of you; release it and lasers homed in on your target. You needed all the help you could get, as this was one tough game (though never unfair).

Soukyugurentai is worth a few hours' bargain-hunting, but purists may want to find the version with the more obscure original cover art.



RADIANT SILVERGUN

Year: 1998
Developer: Treasure
Rarity: 7/10
Estimated Price: £80-£150



▲ Gorgeous, beautiful, stunning… what else could it be but *Radiant Silvergun*?

While it's not as rare as everyone would lead you to believe, there's no denying that this is one of the greatest shmups ever made – something that's reflected in its extortionate price tag.

Easily Treasure's defining moment, *Radiant Silvergun* combines jaw-dropping aesthetics with some of the most absorbing gameplay imaginable to create a shooting experience quite unlike any other. Rather than simply follow the path of other shooters (as it so lazily did with *Gradius V*), Treasure decided to break the mould and create something so refreshingly different to everything else that was around.

Instead of collecting power-ups to increase your ship's effectiveness, you started off with seven powerful weapons. This intense weaponry was a necessity, though, as Radiant *Silvergun* pitted you against an insane amount of incredibly tough bosses. It was these huge metallic behemoths that really showed off Treasure's ingenuity, and if you have ever played the game many of them will still linger in your memory.

Occasionally available on eBay and import sites like www.videogameimports.com, *Radiant Silvergun* is as necessary as breathing – just try not to pay over the odds for it.

BATTLE GAREGGA

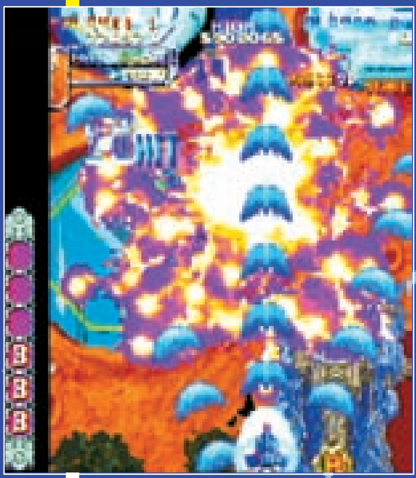
Year: 1998
Developer: Raizing
Rarity: 7/10
Estimated Price: £60-£70

Many shmup fans claim *Battle Garegga* is the greatest Saturn shooter ever made. Although we don't agree with them, it's clear to see why it's such a highly revered game.

It may look a bit drab to begin with, but there's a hell of a lot of variety throughout the seven different levels and the enemy sprites are packed with an impressive amount of detail. Like a few other classic Saturn shooters, *Battle Garegga* is another title that was converted from Sega's ST-V Titan board, and the conversion is very impressive. It's also incredibly tough, so you may want to play in Tate mode in order to give yourself as much manoeuvring space as possible.

Featuring a complex scoring system and some great gameplay, this is perfect for the gamer who's looking for a challenge. Considering its reputation you're unlikely to find it for under £60.





▲ The original *Donpachi* was good, but *DoDonpachi* takes it to the next level. And then some.

DODONPACHI

Year: 1997
Developer: Cave
Rarity: 8/10
Estimated Price: £35-£50

Though *Donpachi* is a more than worthy addition to your Saturn collection, Cave's sequel is even better and definitely worth shelling out for.

The combo scoring system that had proved so popular in *Donpachi* returns, but now it's greatly refined and allows you to rack up a massive amount of points once you know what you're doing. *DoDonpachi*'s visuals are incredibly crisp and even when there's a ridiculous amount of bullets on screen – and believe us, that happens a lot – it's always easy to work out where you are.

Bosses are predictably over the top and take masses of hits before they finally succumb to your firepower and everything is superbly helped along by the game's fantastic soundtrack.

Not content with giving you a practically faultless version of the arcade game, Cave has also thoughtfully provided a Score Attack mode and an all-new Saturn version with extra levels.

If you're looking for a challenging shmup at a low price then *DoDonpachi* is the game for you (providing you can find it, of course).

THUNDER FORCE V

Year: 1997
Developer: Technosoft
Rarity: 7/10
Estimated Price: £30-£60

Thunder Force V was seen as a bit of a departure for Technosoft, as it combines 2D backgrounds with 3D enemies. Fortunately, the gameplay is as good as ever.

Despite the new graphical style (which, sadly, looks rather grainy on the Saturn) this fifth iteration features all the familiar *Thunder Force* mechanics and plays like a dream. Regular weapons like the Hunter and Wave all return and once you're fully powered up your craft is transformed into a lethal killing machine – perfect for taking out the huge end-of-level bosses.

The soundtrack is a typically raucous affair and just what you'd expect from the series, with Technosoft even remixing tunes from the original games to keep the fans happy. Visually, *Thunder Force V* is more than adequate and while there is slightly more slowdown than the PlayStation version, it isn't really that noticeable.

It's the games bosses that really show off the game engine, though, and all are as impressive to look at as they are tough to kill.

While it wasn't the sequel that series followers were hoping for, there's no denying that *Thunder Force V* is still a very solid game. Purists, however, may prefer the more complete PlayStation version.

Year: 1996
Developer: Technosoft
Rarity: 8/10
Estimated Price: £70-£100

HYPER DUEL

Fans of Technosoft's wonderful *Thunder Force* will be more than happy with *Hyper Duel* as it has very similar in play mechanics and a distinct *Thunder Force* feel to it.

A core shooter at heart, *Hyper Duel*'s main draw is the ability to transform from a stylised ship into a flying mech. When in mech form your range of fire is greatly depleted but is much more powerful than your standard firepower. Although both Saturn *Macross* titles and *Assault Suit Leynos 2* featured the same play mechanics, Technosoft pulled it off here with much greater success.

As you progressed deeper into the game you could pick up smaller ships and mechs to increase your chances of survival. They may not have featured fantastic AI but the help was more than welcome and came in particularly useful when going up against the game's bosses.

Rarely cropping up on eBay, a mint copy can now fetch up to £100. It's certainly a nice looking shooter, but unless you're a fan of *Thunder Force*-style titles you may want to pick up one of the cheaper games we're covering instead.



◀ *Thunder Force* remains one of our favourite shooting franchises. If only we could have a new instalment…



▼ Ah, where could a shoot-'em-up be without the obligatory 'let's storm the alien base' level?

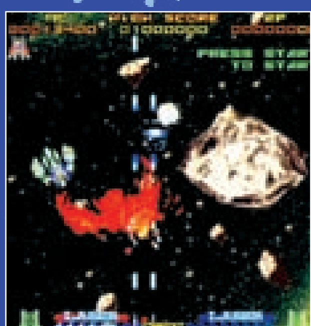


LAYER SECTION

Year: 1995
Developer: Taito
Rarity: 1/10
Estimated Price: £10-£25

Known as *Galactic Attack* in the UK and *Rayforce* in the US, *Layer Section* is one of the few Saturn shmups that actually made it to the UK. One of the first titles released on Taito's F3 board, *Layer Section* looks absolutely gorgeous, especially in the enhanced Tate mode. There's a massive amount of scaling on display (check out the boss on Level 3 who zooms out from behind a planet) and the overall look of the game is of a very high quality. Sound is also of a high standard (although Tamayo Kawamoto's superb techno beats have been altered slightly for the Saturn) and perfectly captures the atmosphere of the game.

Gameplay itself is reminiscent of the classic *Xevious* in that you have just two weapons, a forward-firing laser and a lock-on beam for taking out ground-based foes or those flying on lower levels, hence the name *Layer Section*. Locking onto enemies with your lasers not only takes them out more quickly, but also allows you to increase your all-important score multiplier; it's a great system that's extremely effective. Just because *Layer Section* is very easy to find, that doesn't reflect on its overall quality and it remains an essential purchase.





SEXY PARODIUS

Year: 1996
Developer: Konami
Rarity: 6/10
Estimated Price: £30-£50

If you've a penchant for the weird and wacky, Konami's *Parodius* series will be right up your boulevard. *Sexy Parodius* is the fourth game in the series and definitely our favourite, and no, it's not because it's rather risqué (although that does help).

We like it because it's perhaps the silliest game of the series and is filled with memorable enemy bosses and stupidly cute enemies. Ever seen a giant corn on the cob that fires massive pieces of popcorn at you? Or how about a giant raccoon with enormous shaved testicles? Well, you have now.

For all its surrealness *Sexy Parodius* plays just as well as the other games in the series, and Konami added plenty of extras to enhance its replay factor. There's a massive amount of different characters to play as ranging from rocket-straddling bunny girls to the Option from *Gradius* (complete with mini Vic Vipers as multiples), and there are even multiple routes.

Certain levels have a specific goal to achieve (usually involving collecting coins) and if you manage to achieve your task, you'll get to view alternative stages. It's a great addition to any collection.

SENGOKU BLAEDE

Sengoku Blaede was quite a departure for Psikyo as it marked the first time the developer had created a horizontally scrolling shooter. Fortunately, it got everything right and delivered a great game that's highly reminiscent of its *Gunbird* series.

Set in the sort of feudal Japan that features traditional ninjas and massive, steam-driven weapons of mass destruction, *Sengoku Blaede* keeps things nice and simple. There are no over-the-top power-ups, or intense bullet patterns to remember (although it does get tougher later in the game) —it's just you against the masses and it works superbly.

The look throughout is unique and well detailed, and typical of

Year: 1996
Developer: Psikyo
Rarity: 8/10
Estimated Price: £50-£80

Psikyo's previous efforts. Gameplay is also similar and if you've played titles like *Gunbird* you'll be instantly at home. The five selectable characters (and two hidden ones) handle uniquely and will take some time to master. Holding down your standard fire button will unleash a greater charged shot, while the predictable smart bombs make short work of your opponents.

It's not the greatest shooter on the Saturn and it's extremely expensive, but we're still rather fond of *Sengoku Blaede*.

▼ If you've played any Psikyo shooter, you'll recognise the familiar themes in *Sengoku Blaede*. And they're all great.



BUBBLING UNDER...

Strikers 1945, Cotton 2, Donpachi Gunbird, Strikers 1945 2

UNUSUAL SHOOTERS

WITH SO MANY GREAT SATURN SHMUPS COVERING SUCH A WIDE RANGE OF PLAYING STYLES, YOU'RE BOUND TO FIND SOMETHING A LITTLE OUT OF THE ORDINARY. WITH THIS IN MIND, HERE'S A SELECTION OF UNUSUAL SHOOTERS TO LOOK OUT FOR. THEY MAY NOT REPRESENT THE CREAM OF THE CROP, BUT IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING A LITTLE DIFFERENT THE FOLLOWING FIVE GAMES ARE THE PERFECT PLACE TO START...

GUARDIAN FORCE

Year: 1998
Developer: Success
Rarity: 4/10
Estimated Price: £25-£35

Unlike many of the other shooters here, *Guardian Force* places you in a sturdy tank. Thanks to the nifty control system (pressing the A and B buttons allows you to rotate your tank turret to the left and right) *Guardian Force* enables you to move and fire in completely different directions. This versatility is needed as even the first level takes some effort to get through, although hardcore players shouldn't have too much of a problem with it.

It's a bit garish in the visuals department and there are much better looking shooters available for the Saturn, but there's something about *Guardian Force* that we find really endearing. Not an essential purchase by any means, but if you want something a bit different, give it a try.

THE GAME PARADISE!

Year: 1997
Developer: Jaleco
Rarity: 8/10
Estimated Price: £40-£70

If you thought the *Parodius* games were super cute then the sickly sweetness of *The Game Paradise!* (or *Game Tengoku* as it's also known) will have you reaching for a bucket.

From the moment you reach the player select screen and realise you can select a bomb-throwing pig, you know that reality isn't *The Game Paradise!*'s strong point. Fortunately, the wonderfully wacky visuals and hectic gameplay will soon grab you and you'll be facing off against some of the most ridiculous looking bosses ever to grace a shoot-'em-up.

Pleasantly bonkers and featuring some mad sound effects, *The Game Paradise!* is one of the cutest shooters we've ever played. If you're a fan of the *Parodius* games, it's definitely worth owning; other gamers may find this a little too spaced out.



TWINKLE STAR SPRITES

Year: 1997
Developer: ADK
Rarity: 8/10
Estimated Price: £40-£70

It's not very often that two genres gel together as they have in *Twinkle Star Sprites*. This was one of the many Neo-Geo conversions that made its way to the Saturn and is a superb puzzle/shooter that's insanely addictive.

Taking control of the obligatory adorable sprite, *Twinkle Star Sprites* sees you shooting down wave upon wave of cute aliens. Once destroyed, their disembodied spirits head over to your opponent's side of the screen, who then has to dodge them or fire them back towards you. Needless to say, things get extremely hectic when you have chains of sprites constantly switching screens, and both your mind and trigger finger will be tested.

This game is becoming increasingly rare to pick up nowadays, but if you're looking for a fantastic multiplayer game, you won't be disappointed.



SHIPPU MAHOU DAISAKUSEN / KINGDOM GRAND PRIX

Year: 1996
Developer: Raizing
Rarity: 6/10
Estimated Price: £20-£40

Part racer, part shoot-'em-up, all good – that's the best way to sum up Raizing's quirky little shooter. Whereas *Mahou Daisakusen* was a more traditional shooter, the sequel is anything but and adds some tight racing to all the hectic shooting action. It might sound rather bizarre (and it is), but it works surprisingly well and can be picked up for a reasonable price.

Taking control of one of eight different racers the aim was to finish in first place while destroying as many enemies as possible. Though it might sound straightforward, the fact that your fire button also powered your speed added a whole new dimension to the gameplay. Sure you could race ahead and dodge the incoming enemies but your score would suffer, so a careful balance was required to get the best out of *Kingdom Grand Prix*'s unusual gameplay. Reasonably easy to find on eBay, *Kingdom Grand Prix* is perfect if you fancy a break from the shoot-'em-up norm.



CHOANIKI KYUKYOKU OTOKONOGYAKUSHU (SUPER BIG BROTHER)

Year: 1997
Developer: Nippon Computer System
Rarity: 9/10
Estimated Price: £35-£55

If you're after a complete oddity, why not check out this weird little number from the creators of *Gynoug*?

Sometimes we get a little upset when we play the latest Japanese title as we often feel that the narration is hiding something from us. In the case of *Choaniki*, though, we're prepared to make the exception. When a game features scantily clad musclemen, flying rocket penises and the collection of man protein, the less we know about it the better. *Sexy Parodius* may have been a touch risqué, but *Choaniki* is a different matter entirely. It's not exactly offensive, but it does sometimes cross the line of good taste (level one's boss features some sort of man/penis hybrid, for example).

Still, as far as shooters go there's nothing quite like it on the Saturn and its rarity is starting to push the price up. Be warned, though, it's definitely not for the faint-hearted.



COMPILATION MADNESS

THE SATURN HAS A HUGE NUMBER OF SHOOTING COMPILATIONS, SO IF YOU'VE GOT ANY CASH LEFT OVER LOOK OUT FOR THE THESE GREAT

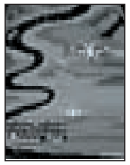
ARCADE GEARS: 3 WONDERS: Contains *Rooster, Chariot* and *Don't Push!*
ARCADE GEARS: IMAGE FIGHT AND X-MULTIPLY: Contains, um, *Image Fight* and *X-Multiply*
CAPCOM GENERATION 1: Contains *1942, 1943* and *1943 Kai*
CAPCOM GENERATION 3: Contains *Exed Eyes, Pirate Ship Higemaru, Son Son* and *Vulgus*
CAPCOM GENERATIONS 4: Contains *Mercs, Gun Smoke* and *Commando*
DETANA! TWINBEE – YAHOO DELUXE PACK: Contains *Twinbee* and *Detana!*
TWINBEE GOKUJYOU PARODIUS DA! DELUXE PACK: Contains *Parodius* and *Ultimate Parodius*
GRADIUS DELUXE: Contains *Gradius* and *Gradius 2 Gofer*
KONAMI ANTIQUES MSX COLLECTION ULTRA PACK: Contains numerous MSX arcade conversions including *Gradius, Super Cobra, TwinBee, Gradius 2, Time Pilot, Parodius* and *Salamander*
SALAMANDER DELUXE PACK PLUS: Contains *Salamander, Salamander 2* and *Life Force*
SONIC WINGS SPECIAL: Contains remixed versions of *Sonic Wings 1, 2* and *3*
THUNDER FORCE GOLD PACK 1: Contains *Thunder Force 2* and *3*
THUNDER FORCE GOLD PACK 2: Contains *Thunder Force AC* and *4*



SHMUPS family tree

Shoot-'em-ups (or shmups, if you prefer) have been a staple of the arcade scene since the late Seventies. With games like *Psyvariar 2* and *Ikaruga* still proving popular with today's gamers, we felt it was time to look at some of the most influential vertical shooters to blast into our arcades.

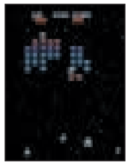
SKY RAIDER



1978

It might look archaic by today's standards, but this was the world's first scrolling shooter and was horribly addictive to boot. Using your on-screen cursor, you had to destroy as many objects as possible. Fortunately, they didn't fire back at you, but this was still challenging.

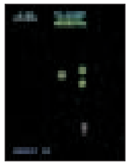
GALAXIAN



1979

Galaxian was the first ever game to feature enemies that actually flew down the screen and attacked you. It was a world away from the regimented attacks of *Space Invaders* and is still highly playable. Plenty of clones followed, but nothing can touch the mighty *Galaxian*.

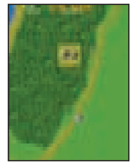
MOON CRESTA



1980

Now we're getting there. *Moon Cresta* featured many staples of current-day shooters, including power ups and different attack waves. A nice touch was the way your ship split into three to represent each of your available lives, but the last ship was absolutely massive.

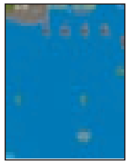
XEVIOUS



1983

Xevious was one of the first shooters to have proper scrolling backgrounds (as opposed to the scrolling stars of many previous titles) and also enabled your craft to drop bombs. *Super Xevious* appeared in 1984 and featured tougher, more varied enemies.

1942



1984

Capcom's excellent *1942* was the first ever shmup to trade in the typical jets for a good old-fashioned WWII fighter plane. There was even a roll button to let you avoid enemies (although, admittedly, this was limited). *1942* had several sequels and home console iterations.

LIBERATION



1984

Although fairly generic, *Liberation* was the first vertical shooter to feature a helicopter. Once a level was cleared and your helicopter had landed, you carried on your mission via a tank or jeep. Sadly, apart from your mode of transport, there was little to set this game apart.

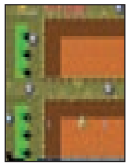
HALLEY'S COMET



1986

Some games are way ahead of their time and *Halley's Comet* is a perfect example. Great-looking visuals, superb power ups and fantastic gameplay totally made you forget it was 1986. A brilliant blaster and no mistake, this is well worth tracking down.

SLAP FIGHT



1986

Like *Gradius*, *Slap Fight* featured a weapons bar from which you could select firepower by collecting a set amount of stars. This title had superb level design and a varied array of power ups that actually bolted on to your ship. A later Mega Drive conversion was hideous.

TIGER-HELI



1985

Not only did *Tiger-Heli* feature huge amounts of carnage (and some nifty smart bombs) it was also possible to pick up mini copters that would strap onto your chopper to add to its firepower. Complete the game and you'd restart at a faster pace.

TWIN BEE



1985

The vertical yin to *Parodious'* horizontally scrolling yang, *Twin Bee* was a basic-looking cute-'em-up that let two players play simultaneously. Shooting the game's many Bells would make them change colour and provided the player with different power ups.

DANGAR UFO ROBO



1985

Dangar UFO Robo enabled you to take charge of a huge robot that could temporarily split into three parts. There were many character-based shooters available, but this was one of the quirkiest and earliest that we found. Characters-driven shmups later became a sub-genre.

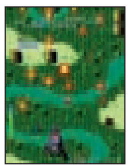
1943



1987

Capcom innovated yet again, with *1943* becoming the first shooter to feature an energy bar as opposed to multiple lives. It was even possible for players to share energy by flying over each other for a few seconds. *1943* later got an update, but only in Japan.

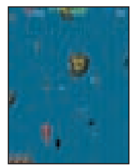
BERMUDA TRIANGLE



1987

Not exactly a superb shooter, but any game that enables backwards scrolling is definitely going to be an eye-opener. *Bermuda Triangle* featured some nice chunky visuals, but not a lot else. Definitely worth a look, though we've never seen a home version.

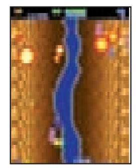
TWIN COBRA



1987

Known as *Kyukyoku Tiger* in Japan, *Twin Cobra* was a helicopter shooter that shared plenty of similarities with the excellent *Raiden* and also used the same boardset as Taito's *Flying Shark*. Unfortunately, it's since been eclipsed by a superb sequel.

GEMINI WING



1987

Tecmo's *Gemini Wing* was a great cutesy shooter that featured an excellent two-player mode and some seriously weird end-of-level bosses. Special mention has to go the Malteser-spewing walrus that lived in a waterfall, and the laser-spouting second boss.

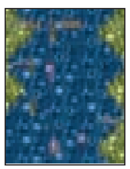
DRAGON SPIRIT



1987

Dragon Spirit saw you in control of a huge blue dragon and proved to be very popular in the late Eighties. Collecting power ups would add extra heads to your body, which would increase your dragon's firepower. *Dragon Sabre* was the average sequel.

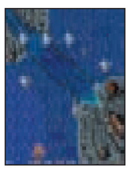
ARMED FORMATION F



1988

While its organic look was blatantly borrowed from *R-Type*, *Armed Formation F* did feature a nice power-up system. It was possible to place your weapons in different positions in order to maximise your ship's effectiveness. What a shame the levels were so generic…

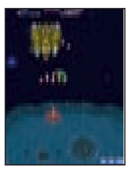
IMAGE FIGHT



1988

Image Fight by Irem is easily one of the toughest shooters we've ever played. There was a decent amount of weapons on offer and it was even possible to throw some, boomerang-style, at your opponents. Irem is still regarded as one of the premier shmup developers.

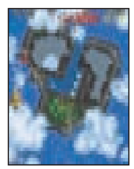
TRUXTON



1988

Truxton was an extremely solid shooter that was known as *Tatsujin* in Japan. The game featured massive smart bombs, distinctive power ups and also received high-quality Mega Drive and PC Engine conversions. Well worth a play. *Truxton II* took the series even further.

METAL HAWK

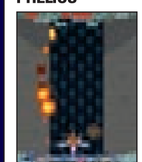


1988

Complete with its own custom cabinet, *Metal Hawk* was an excellent helicopter-based shmup that had a very distinctive look. Created by Namco, this title had fantastic visuals, great power ups and some superb scaling effects. A great alternative to the traditional shooter.

CUTE-'EM-UPS

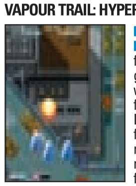
PHELIOS



1988

Capcom's *Phelios* was another shooter to place you on a mythical beast, but this time it was a Pegasus. You also sprouted wings later in the game and could play with a second player. Fairly generic nowadays, *Phelios* was a great blaster for its time.

VAPOUR TRAIL: HYPER OFFENCE FORMATION



1989

Multiple scrolling speeds, fantastic parallax and a great rock soundtrack were just a few of the features that separated Data East's superb shooter from its peers. Though reasonably tough, it was never unfair and is still good for a quick blast.

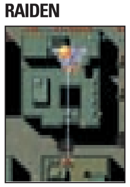
NEBULASRAY



1990

A stunning-looker shooter for its time, *Nebulasray* featured amazing pre-rendered backdrops and some extremely intense gameplay. The coin-op board is extremely hard to get hold of and goes for a fair price on eBay, but if you can find one you're in for a treat.

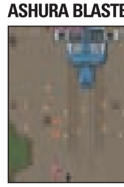
RAIDEN



1990

Raiden managed to combine slick visuals with pulsating gameplay and intense enemy waves to create a gripping shooter. Such was its popularity it nearly received as many home conversions as Irem's classic *R-Type* and had plenty of sequels.

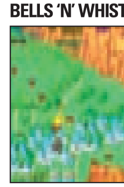
ASHURA BLASTER



1990

Ashura Blaster gave you a choice of different smart bombs at the beginning of each intense level. A particular favourite was the bomb that was linked to a space satellite. Needless to say, the end result was pretty spectacular and eye melting.

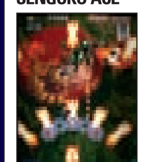
BELLS 'N' WHISTLES



1991

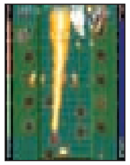
Konami's sequel to *Twin Bee* featured prettier visuals and even more manic gameplay than its predecessor, making for a pleasant diversion from all the serious shooters. It was known as *Detana!! Twin Bee* in Japan and was eventually ported to the Saturn.

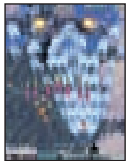
SENGOKU ACE



1993

Take a flight through feudal Japan in this great character-based shoot-'em-up. Lovely design and some great music blended together to create a superb shooter. A sequel appeared in 1996 and was followed by *Sengoku Blade*. The third title appeared on the Saturn.

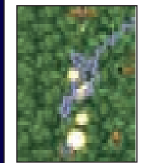
LETHAL THUNDER

1991
We love a gimmick and *Lethal Thunder*'s was a particularly nice touch. The harder you mashed the fire buttons, the more impressive your ship's firepower would be. Another great little shooter from Irem, but playing too much would knacker your wrists…

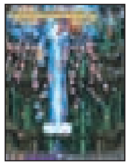
BATSUGAN

1993
We love a frantic shooter and *Batsugan* is one of the best – ridiculously oversized weapons are just the thing you need when faced with ridiculous amounts of enemies. Received a great Saturn conversion that proved that SEGA's machine was shump-fans' heaven.

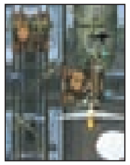
RAYFORCE

1993
Known as *Layer Section* to PAL Saturn owners, *Rayforce* featured the unique ability to lock on to your opponents and release impressive lasers. Great level design and a unique style really helped *Rayforce* to stand out from the crowd. The sequel was just as good.

HELICOPTERS

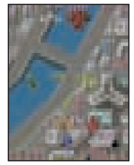
DAIOH

1993
Another oddity, *Daioh* is famous for featuring the most buttons ever in an arcade shoot-'em-up. Although very tough to play (the button juggling was on a par with *Defender*), the six fire buttons, decent power ups and great bosses took you back for one more go.

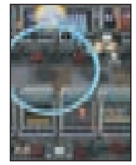
DONPACHI

1995
Atlus/Cave has made a great many superb shooters, but *DonPachi* is still one of our favourites. It wasn't as manic as its sequel, but this was still great stuff. A Saturn port also appeared and was a faithful conversion. *Donpachi*'s bosses were great – like the mecha bee.

STRIKERS 1945

1995
Obviously inspired by Capcom's *1942* series, Psikyo's *Strikers* series was set in an alternative WWII and came complete with massive mechas. The game went on to spawn four sequels (including a rather lacklustre Neo Geo version).

BATTLE GAREGGA

1996
You want intensity? Try *Battle Garegga* and prepare for some seriously hectic gameplay. Wonderful visuals, gripping gameplay and a superb ranking system helps make *Battle Garegga* one of our favourite shooters. It's available for the Saturn but is extremely expensive.

TWIN COBRA 2

1995
It might have taken a few years to appear, but Taito's follow-up to *Twin Cobra* was well worth the wait. With better level design, updated visuals and cool bosses, this was a worthy sequel. Like *Twin Cobra* you could take out ground and air targets, and collect power ups.

GAME PARADISE: THE MASTER OF SHOOTING

1995
Shooters don't get much weirder than this. Featuring some crazy characters (including a bomb-throwing pig) and superb cartoony visuals, *Game Paradise* is a unique experience. Yet another shooter that received a great Saturn home conversion.

KINGDOM GRAND PRIX

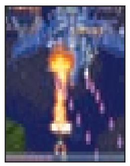
1994
Now this was a very strange beast. Raizing/Eighting's *Kingdom Grand Prix* threw you into a weird experience featuring shooting and racing. It made for some interesting strategies (race or shoot?) and had some great (and tough) bosses.

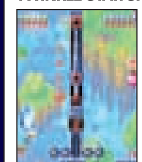
DANGUN FEVERON

1998
Themed around the disco scene, *Dangun Feveron* is simply sublime. Fantastic remixed disco tunes, crazy bosses and mental smart bombs made for a totally unique experience. One to play with the sound turned up loud and the lights turned off.

SOUKYUU GURENTI

1996
Known as *Terra Diver* in the West, *Soukyuu Gurenti* was another superb shooter from Raizing/Eighting. Featuring an extremely strong weapon system and some distinctive visuals, it was published, surprisingly, by Electronic Arts. Hardcore gamers still call it *Souky*.

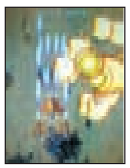
DO DONPACHI

1996
Known as being one of the first 'Berserk' shooters, *Do DonPachi* was not for the faint-hearted. Right from the off, you were armed with ridiculous weaponry and faced off against huge numbers of enemies and bullets. A true test of skill and no mistake.

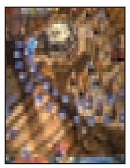
TWINKLE STAR SPRITES

1996
Such was the popularity of the Mega Drive game it eventually spawned its own arcade conversion, a superb puzzle-based shooter that saw you competing against a variety of opponents. Fiendishly addictive, this went on to receive a Dreamcast conversion.

SHIELD SHMUPS

RADIANT SILVERGUN

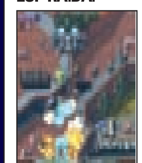
1998
Treasure's *Radiant Silvergun* is arguably the greatest shoot-'em-up ever created. Three-player action, some superb weapon and level design, not to mention boss after boss made this an unforgettable experience. Funnily enough, it was another great Saturn title.

RAIDEN FIGHTERS JET

1998
This may have been the last in a new generation of *Raiden* games, but it was definitely the best. There were a massive amount of ships to choose from and the explosions and effects were superb. A highly addictive blaster that was a great showcase for the franchise.

GUWANGE

1999
Guwange was another title set in feudal Japan, but had the added draw of including lashings of gore – shoot a demon and it would explode in a satisfying spray of claret. This was another cool shooter from Atlus/Cave, but is definitely one to play with the lights on.

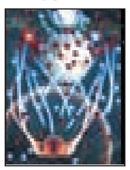
GIGA WING

1998
As shoot-'em-ups featured increasing amounts of enemies and bullets to avoid, Capcom decided to give players a shield to reflect and repel bullets. Now slightly dated, it appeared on the Dreamcast. It can be picked up for a few pounds – much less than the sequel.

ESP RA.DE.

1998
Control a psychic character and unleash a swathe of destruction in this frenetic bullet sprayer. Manic gameplay, superb power ups and wonderful visuals really helped to set *ESP RA.DE.* apart from the crowd. Its sequel will soon be on the PS2 and Xbox.

1994: THE LOOP MASTER

2000
Capcom's last shooter in the *1942* series may have failed to offer the excitement of the Cave-inspired *19XX*, but still managed to deliver some solid gameplay, and it traded the vertical monitor for a horizontal one. Yet another shooter to feature the dreaded energy bar.

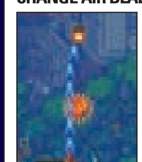
IKARUGA

2000
Treasure returned with an unofficial follow-up to *Radiant Silvergun*. Your craft could switch between two colours, which would allow you to absorb the relevant coloured bullets. Manic gameplay and superb level design cemented *Ikaruga*'s status as an instant classic.

PSYVARIAR

2000
Psyvariar was the first title to use the 'buzz technique' (a system that would award you with points for actually grazing enemy bullets). *Psyvariar* is now available for a very good price on the PS2. Track this down and you'll get a short but very satisfying shmup.

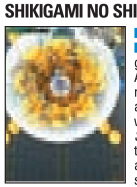
MARS MATRIX

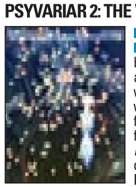
2000
Mars Matrix may have looked awful, but underneath was an extremely solid shooter. Like *Giga Wing* (also by Capcom) this featured a shield that could repel bullets and went on to receive an NTSC Dreamcast conversion. The home port featured plenty of extras.

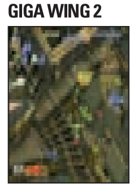
CHANGE AIR BLADE

1999
An interesting shooter from Sammy that allowed the second player to morph into a boss. Despite the intriguing set-up, *Change Air Blade* was a fairly generic shooter that looked rather tired compared to similar games and soon disappeared into obscurity.

DO DONPACHI DAI OUJOU

2003
The fourth *DonPachi* game from Atlus/Cave was business as usual and retained the same superb gameplay the rest of the series had offered. It was recently released on the PlayStation2 and has gained even higher recognition. A quality shooter.

SHIKIGAMI NO SHIRO II

2003
After the disappointing first game (it was far too slow) Alfa System pressed all the right buttons (pun intended) and hit back with a superb sequel. *Shikigami II* used a similar technique to *Psyvariar*, but added some superb anime-style visuals.

PSYVARIAR 2: THE WILL TO FABRICATE

2003
There were even more bullets in *Psyvariar 2* and, as a result, the gameplay was even more hectic. A worthy follow-up with a huge following in Japan, it's a must for any shooter fan. Like *Psyvariar*, it's also available on the PS2 and the ill-fated Dreamcast.

GIGA WING 2

2001
Breathtaking sequel that featured gorgeous visuals, excellent weapons and some fantastic sound. Levels would become packed with bullets and careful use of your shield was needed to survive the onslaught. Another title to receive an NTSC Dreamcast release.

Retro

RESTORATI

WE SPEAK TO ARCHER MACLEAN ABOUT HIS LOVE OF COLLECTING AND RESTORING ARCADE MACHINES

Archer Maclean is a man of many talents. He's well known for the games that he made in the early Eighties and mid-Nineties, but he also has several other hidden skills. Not only is he the owner of one of the largest private coin-op collections in Europe, but he's also a dab hand at putting the little blighters back together again. Retro took time out to gaze over Archer's absurdly cool collection and find out just how he does it…

THE INTERVIEW

Retro: When did you first take an interest in coin ops?

Archer Maclean: When I was about 10 years old I remember seeing my first *Pong* machine. We were on a school trip and the teacher told me to get some ice creams for the rest of the class. I walked through a seafront arcade in order to get to the ice cream vendor on the other side and there was this bright yellow *Pong* machine. I'd never seen any electronic game at this point and after watching the dot moving around the screen for a while I ended up spending all the ice cream money on it. I then got a huge telling off from the teacher after I told her that I'd been beaten up and had all the money stolen. As I got older I would go and hunt down new arcades and machines to play on, even if it meant I had to cycle for 20 miles.

R: When did you buy your first machine and how much did it cost?

AM: I bought my first full-sized machine around 1984, as I had some royalties coming in for *Dropzone*. An arcade operator had placed an ad in the local paper as he was closing down, so I phoned him up to see what he had left. He mentioned a battered (but working) *Defender* that I could have for £100 if I was still interested. Needless to say, I couldn't get there quick enough. I only had a hatchback but I still managed to get this entire machine into the back of it, with about three foot of it sticking out the back of the car.

Within months of that first purchase I bought *Robotron* (which I've now had for 21 years), *Star Gate* and a *Space Invaders* that was about seven or eight years old. At the time all these operators had no idea their machines would become collectable and they were simply trashing them or allowing them to gather dust.

R: You now have over 150 machines. Where do you keep them all?

AM: I'm lucky in that I have quite a few large cellar rooms under my house (they're not smartly decorated, but there's plenty of space) and a very sizeable garage where I do all my restorations, so that's where everything can now be found. At the moment, though, I've reached the limit of what I can currently store and need to rethink things.

R: Is there anything you're still after?

AM: Well, I was looking for *Domino Man*, which is a simple game of standing dominos up and knocking them down, but I've now managed to secure one in America. It's currently sitting pretty in Chicago and is in completely mint condition so I won't even need to worry about restoring it. The only other title I'm still after at the moment is a Nichibutsu *Crazy Climber*. I say the Nichibutsu version because it's a very unusually shaped machine from Japan and is very different to the UK machine that everyone remembers. A mate of mine, Oliver, has actually got one but he doesn't play it – it simply sits in storage. So, Ol, if you're reading this, drop me a line.



R: What sort of contacts have you made over the years and how easy is it for you to source cabinets?

AM: I've got a massive amount of friends and contacts in America, mainly because that's where all the machines were. Arcades were absolutely everywhere at one time. You could go out, have a burger and then head off to the arcades with your mates – America was where everything was happening. While the same thing did happen

ON DRAMA

Retro Feature

> **"I SPENT THE TEACHER'S ICE-CREAM MONEY ON PONG BUT TOLD HER I'D BEEN ROBBED"**

here, the scene was nowhere near as big. There's a massive amount of collectors in the US, whereas in England there appears to be a lot of people simply squabbling over rotten wood, as there's not much left of the actual machines (in part, though, this is mainly due to the British climate, as it doesn't really lend itself to arcade collecting). While I have built up more contacts in America there are still quite a few serious collectors in the UK and you quickly get to know who they all are.

R: You've got one of the largest private coin-op collections in Europe. Have you ever considered opening it up to the public?

AM: Usually, if I'm going to have a meeting it's for half a dozen or so friends out of the collecting fraternity and they'll all come around for a glass or two. In terms of public stuff, the biggest problem is that practically everything is at my house. The one time that I had a bunch of complete strangers around a few of them misbehaved and just walked around my house taking photos. Finally, a lot of my restored machines are in absolutely pristine condition. It's almost as if they've come out of a time warp and the thought of someone putting their pint on the top like they used to absolutely horrifies me.



R: So it's not something you'll consider again in the future?

AM: Well, one thing I am thinking about is putting 20 or 30 machines somewhere else and occasionally opening it up like a museum, but that presents its own problems. While

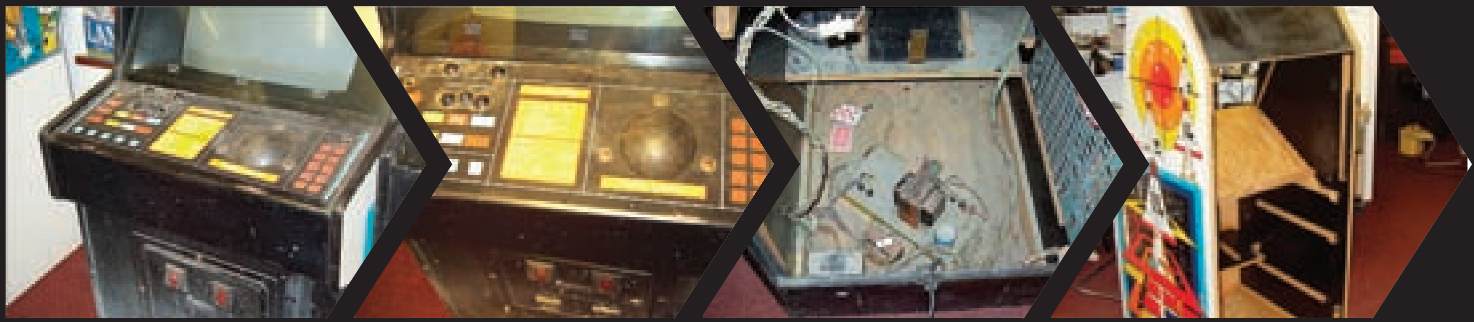
20 STEPS TO PERFECTION…

01 "This particular *Missile Command* machine was obtained from a UK seller who said it 'used to work but packed up' and he couldn't be bothered to fix it. One look told me it was a wreck but due to the wood shell being solid I felt I could polish a turd back into a classic arcade game."

02 "Here's a close-up of the control panel and it's in a right sorry state… Knackered, paint-splattered front, scratched and gouged sides. Fortunately, the actual wood wasn't too bad. Don't you just love that over-used eBay phrase 'untested, but might work'?"

03 "If the outside looked pitiful, the inside was atrocious. Here we've got a burnt monitor, faulty main board, no lamps, buggered switches, fag-burnt control panel and rust everywhere else. I'm not sure where the playing cards came from, but they didn't stay…"

04 "There was a total strip down including removal of all electronics, the loom, the screen-burnt old 1980 monitor, the lighting system, the power supply, back door, front coin area, control panel, buttons and just about everything else bar the shell's structural parts."





▼ Just imagine if you could relax in a room like this after a hard day at the office. We're very jealous.

▼ An extremely rare cocktail cab of *Robotron*. Nice.



everyone wants to enjoy playing the machines, no-one is prepared to pay a nominal fee – say, £10 – to help the actual collector who's maintaining them. Everyone simply expects it all to be for free and when people have tried to do it for a small consideration in the past, they get no end of backbiting comments.

Dom 'Rav' Escott had a great collection of cabs up for the public to enjoy but he just got so frustrated with everyone's attitude, yet they all expected him to do it. It's like paying to get into a museum for anything, though. People argue and say, 'Why should you pay to see something as old as that?' but they all want to see it – it just doesn't make any sense…

R: How do you think retro games compare to their modern-day counterparts?

AM: To be honest, I don't think you can really compare them. It's like comparing a Morris Minor to the latest Ferrari – they're both cars, but they do completely different things. However, I do think that it's an experience to play arcade games as they were originally intended. Playing *Asteroids* for real, with really bright bullets flying all over the place through a proper vector monitor is a totally different experience to when you play it on MAME. It fact, it really annoys me when someone says, 'yeah, I've played *Asteroids* on MAME, it's really boring.' Yet when they come to my house and play the actual machine they're completely blown away by how good it still is.

R: So when did you decide to start restoring machines?

AM: It all started in 2000 when I designed and built my own race car called the Maclean F1. One of the requirements was that I needed to make a dashboard that looked completely professional. This in turn involved looking into all sorts of weird ways of designing, printing or laminating the eventual dashboard.

I soon realised that all the skills I'd learnt for restoring wood, metal, plastics and glass could be applied to my machines. I remember Rav coming down and looking at my run-down *Missile Command* cabinet and I was telling him that I could rebuild various parts of it including the artwork. He just looked at me and said, 'you're barking'. The next time he visited I showed him the finished machine and he just couldn't believe what he saw.

It wasn't without some major commitment on my part though; doing a piece of side art for the cabinet alone took me around 20 to 30 hours to edit and make it perfect within 300dpi of where the original graphics should be. Then of course I had to print it, cover it, apply it… it just

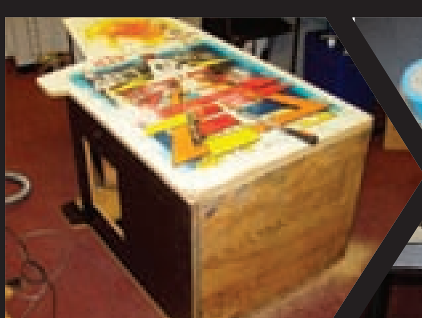
20 STEPS TO PERFECTION…

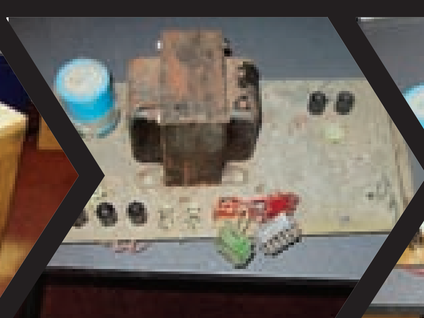
05 "Then I hoovered it out, removing large two-inch long insect chrysalis shells, plenty of spider webs and some mouse evidence. I sanded entire wooden inside surfaces, cleaned off artworked sides, filled all dings with wood filler, rubbed down all the sides until they were near smooth."

06 "I re-profiled the edges where I knew I had to fold the side artwork around to hide under the brand new black T-moulding edging strip, hoovered out result and prepared for artwork and panel work. Structurally, I made the shell more rigid as it had got a bit 'loose' over the years."

07 "The next step was removing all metal mounting strips, metal guides and other bits. Dismantled power supply, and shot-blasted the lot. Then everything was tarted up in either black or bronze to look new again before reassembly. Even if it wasn't new, at least it looked like it."

08 "Made a complete control panel with new control panel overlay, rebuilt the entire trackball assembly using a new 2004 solution to one of the original's design faults using a fixed bearing. I put in a 360 bearing instead and used new roller bearings throughout too."









WHY I LOVE ROBOTRON

Archer is well known for his fondness for Robotron. Here's why…

"For some reason it's a constant challenge. I think it's because you're standing there using your left arm to steer, your right to fire, you're having to use your eyes all over the screen and your ears are telling you what you're not seeing. Then of course you've got to remember to actually breathe and stand up. It's quite an experience and you'll often end up sweating after playing it for 20 minutes. It's such a physical game that no amount of mobile phone or PlayStation conversions will ever be able to recreate the real thing. It also never stops – it just gets harder and harder and harder."

went on and on.

I love it though, as it stops me thinking about my work. One of the things I remember when I used to write games myself was the intensity of concentration that was needed when working. There were plenty of things for me to worry about and I'd quite often find myself working through the night until eight the following morning. I've now replicated that experience by destroying an arcade machine right the way through the night and it's quite weird to go through it again. You really do get into it, though, and the end result, of course, is a perfect machine.

R: Are any particular skills needed?

AM: Well, you certainly don't learn them overnight – it all comes down to practice, practice and more practice. Ideally you should be good at woodwork and if you're going to recreate your own art you'll really need to excel at *Paintshop Pro* or *Photoshop*. Then of course you have to figure out colour matching, printing, laminating, adhesive applying, T-moulding and so on. If you're planning on recreating a control panel, you'll need to know metal workers who can precisely replicate it within half a millimetre of the original. Then you have to learn about shot blasting so that you can restore a completely knackered fag-burned control panel to brand new in order to apply your own artwork. These skills do take time to learn but anyone can pick them up. You just have to ask yourself if you have the space, time and money to put into it.

R: Where did you learn to fix machines? Were you self-taught?

AM: I've seen some other people in the UK who have done some pretty extreme restorations that made me want to go off and do something just as good, or better than what they've achieved. There are also plenty of websites out there with guys (usually from America) saying how they've solved a particular problem.

I remember seeing a person in 2001 who was restoring a *Pac-Man* machine and was trying to figure out how to colour match the machine. He ended up buying himself a colour printer spectrometer which is a device used in the paint industry for car body matching. So yeah, while you do pick things up here and there, you definitely tend to get inspired by what's been achieved by others. What I do now is put up my own photos on websites so other people can see what I've achieved. While it can get annoying answering hundreds of emails, it's definitely good fun spreading the knowledge around the community and it's something I really enjoy.

R: How long can restoration take and what machines cause you problems?

AM: Well, the *Missile Command* cabinet that I rebuilt (see '20 Steps To Perfection') took around 100 hours to finish and was spread over quite a few months, but it all depends on what you're doing. The main reason the *Missile Command* cabinet was such a big project is because I'd completely stripped it down and rebuilt it from the ground up.

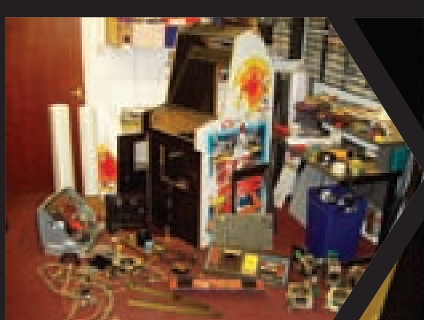
As for machines causing problems, that generally doesn't tend to happen



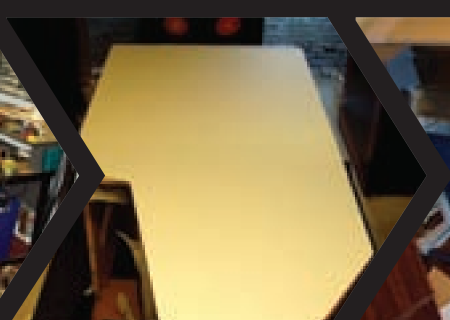
▲ A lovingly restored *Pac-Man* cabinet in all its glory. Is there no end to Archer's many talents?

nowadays. Woodwork, artwork and even the plastic are all things that I can now source or make myself, so it has become a lot easier than when I first started. The one thing that is always a problem, though, is replacing some of the weird electronics that certain machines have. A lot of the early vector games in particular had very strange electronics that only existed in the day and pretty much all but disappeared around 1983 and 1984 after cheaper alternatives appeared. If you want to replace a vector monitor or a vector boardset for something

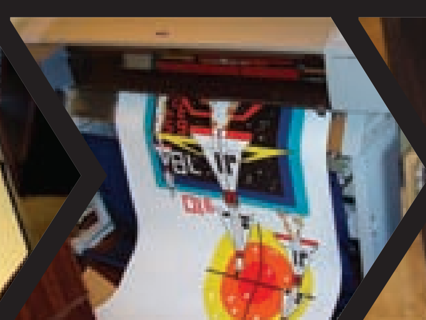
09 "Made a perfect metal copy of the original control panel, and bought a control panel overlay graphic from a specialist supplier in the US. I managed to find five working LED buttons and restored the cone mounts that show through the control panel."



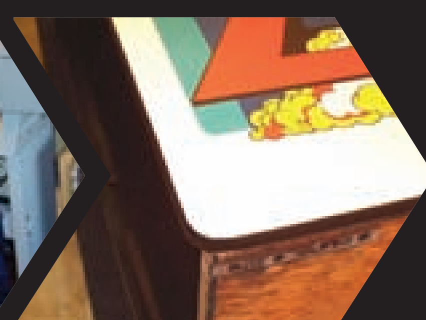
10 "Spent ages lying the cab flat on its side and applying an underlay of thick white vinyl to smooth over any remaining dimples in the wood, and then applied with great care my new hand-made side art prints – you only get one shot at it else it can turn into a big disaster to redo."



11 "Scanned entire side art of the machine to 300dpi, as well as what was left of the A2-sized operator's instruction sheet still mounted on the back door. I spent 25 hours graphically stitching it all together and doing all the digital image 'repairs' in order to make it as authentic as possible."



12 "You need a high-spec PC as the image file was 500Mb alone and I needed 4Gb of cache RAM for it to run smoothly. Then the colour matching tests and numerous print tests for perfection matching to an unfaded cab I have. The final result was coated in an invisible polymer layer to prevent the usual scratching and scuffing."





like *Star Wars* you're in trouble unless you can find a spare one. Then, of course, you have to be able to fix it or find someone else who can. Luckily, I can do some electronics work myself and there are a good half a dozen people around the UK who are particularly gifted at fixing certain types of machines.

R: How hard is it to get hold of parts these days?

AM: To be honest it depends on what you're after. There are numerous American companies who supply artwork, although there are plenty of retailers out there who'll also supply you with total crap. While reproduction parts were originally hard to get hold of there are now quite a few companies springing up throughout America (although I've yet to find one in the UK) that provide anything from new control panels to monitors. These days, though, I tend to totally reproduce my own artwork and if it costs money I sell it on to someone as soon as I can. Generally speaking, nowadays it isn't too much of a problem to find parts if you're genuinely prepared to look for them.



R: Are many people looking for restored cabinets?

AM: I wouldn't say that there's a large market, but anyone who comes around my house normally says, 'Bloody hell, I didn't even realise they made those things any more.' Everyone knows *Pac-Man*, for example, but it's quite a different thing to see a full-size six-foot-high yellow *Pac-Man* machine in someone's house. People definitely love the idea of buying cabinets, but it's the problems like where you're going to put it and how you can fix it when it goes wrong that aren't considered. While some people will often ask me for advice, they'll sometimes end up buying something off eBay and find out it's nothing like the thumbnail they saw when they finally get to pick it up.

Luckily, though, these people often tend to take the machines home anyway to restore themselves and end up becoming yet another valuable source of information in the community. It's definitely an addictive hobby, I know that much for certain.

"EVERYONE KNOWS PAC-MAN, BUT THE FULL-SIZE CABINET IS DIFFERENT"

R: What sort of conditions do your machines normally turn up in and have there been any real horror stories?

AM: If I'm buying something in America I'll usually go there on a business trip, as I like to see the machine before buying it. You'd never buy a 25-year-old Ford Escort off eBay without looking at it first and it's exactly the same thing with arcade machines. Sadly, I've occasionally had something horrible turn up when it was freighted over as it was severely bashed during the overseas trip. While I can normally restore them with a bit of hard work it still tends to be very annoying when it happens.

Something else that upsets me is when you find a strange machine that's been sitting in someone's shed for the past 20 years and you're told it's in great condition. So you go over there and find out that it weighs an extra 10 kilos because it's full of water, has a woodworm infestation or has had an internal fire. Horror stories do exist but, fortunately, they're getting rarer.

R: Ever had a machine you desperately wanted to fix but was beyond repair?

AM: It has happened, but usually I'll simply turn the machine into spares. I do have a very early Atari game called *Space Race* that isn't perfect as far as authenticity is concerned. I don't know of any others in the UK, and I haven't managed to get it working properly yet. The most frustrating thing is that inside the actual cabinet is a black

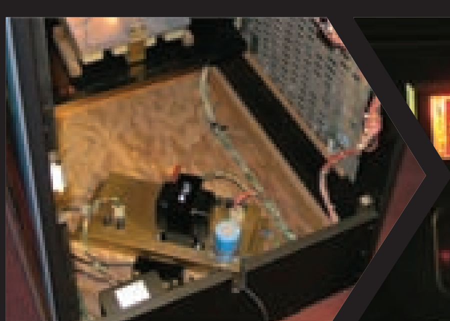
20 STEPS TO PERFECTION…

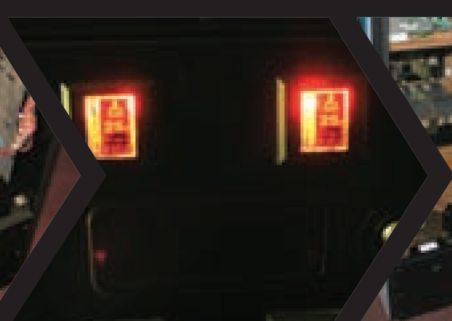
13 "Re-wired the entire cabinet with the original loom – repaired and cleaned as necessary. Re-installed the completely rebuilt original power supply. Replaced the big capacitors as they can tend to dry out after 25 years… Reinstalled the main circuit boards."

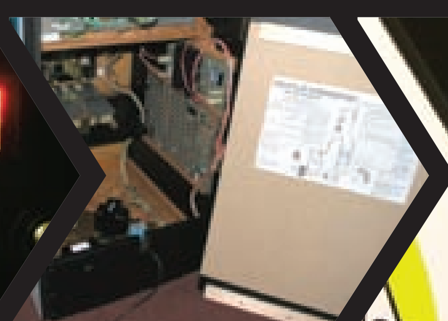
14 "Dismantled and shot blasted then powder coated the coin door and rebuilt. Custom made some tiny red transparent coin slot stickers for the new owner, Tony, who happened to be one of the world record holders on *Missile Command* back in the day, and intends to get a new record…"

15 "Made up a new back door, lower panel and top vent section, and covered all three in textured vinyl black material to look like the original. Then printed off a copy of the back door sheet instructions and fitted those back in the place they would have occupied."

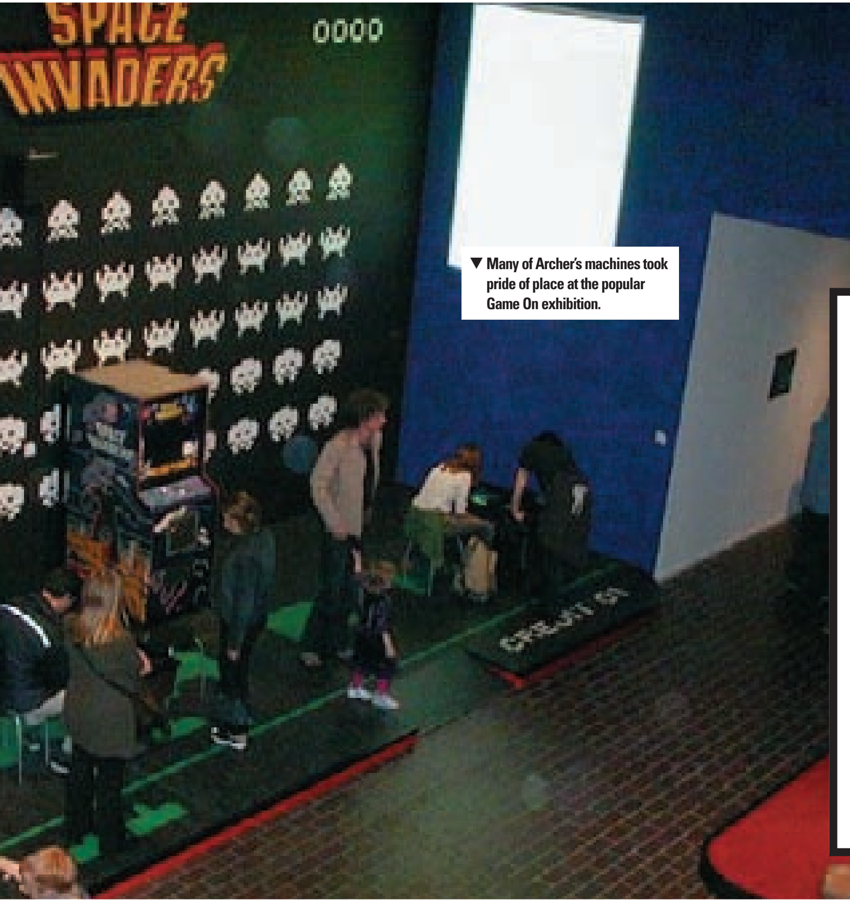
16 "Made up and printed perfect copies of the original manufacturer's warning stickers that are plastered all over the original machines but get ripped off when cabs get moved about over the decades. It's the details like these that can get forgotten by lesser restorers."











▼ Many of Archer's machines took pride of place at the popular Game On exhibition.



and white valve telly, which is a TV that simply doesn't seem to exist any more. While I can fix transistor stuff, this valve system has me totally nonplussed. I guess there's somebody out there with the relevant experience to fix it, but so far I've not been able to find anyone. While I can make it work by plugging it into a modern monitor, it's not the same as being able to use the original TV that came with it.

R: What restoration are you most proud of and why?
AM: To be honest, there's several. The *Missile Command* is certainly one that I'm very proud of, but I've also done a very thorough *Asteroids* restoration and an Atari *Black Widow*. One of my biggest achievements, though, is a *Computer Space* cabinet that I restored. It was exhibited at the Barbican Game On exhibition a few years back and I was very proud to have it there. The main reason it was such an amazing restoration was due to the sheer amount of paintwork that was involved. It's covered in a spangly blue paint and was recoated 12 times. I ended up having to employ a paint specialist who worked on custom cars and he had to get a special nozzle made because the flecks in the paint caused his normal nozzle to constantly bung up. Finally, I'm also pleased with my *Pong* machine that was also on shown at the event. While it had only been touched up, it had a plinth on the bottom of the machine that read 'Game invented by Al Acorn, Produced by Atari, Lent by Archer Maclean'. Here I was, 30 years later, proudly showing off my own version of the machine that had got me into gaming in the first place.

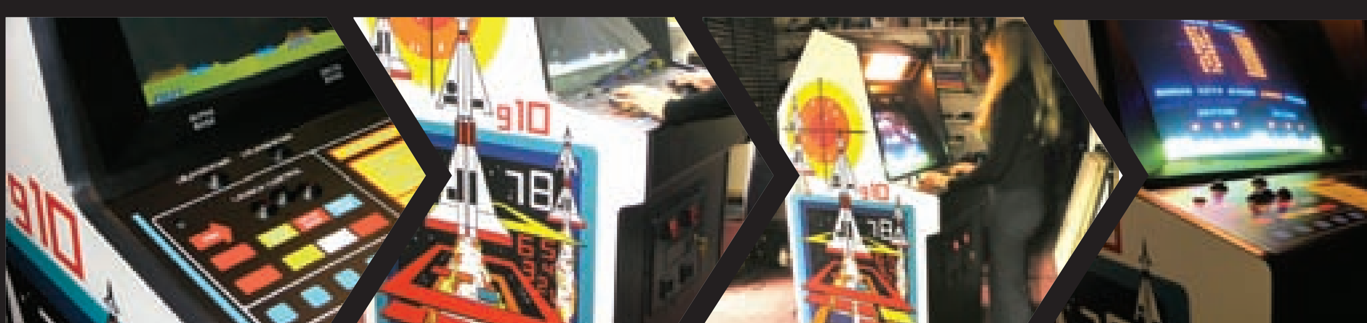
R: What advice would you give to anyone wanting to pursue a similar hobby?
AM: The bottom line is that if you come across a bargain and it's mint you should snap it up. It's a well-known saying but you basically get what you pay for. If you're going to get into the collection scene you have to decide whether you want perfectly mint machines, or if you're happy with collecting for the sheer authenticity of it. If you are going to restore you don't have to be a perfectionist, but you should be prepared to take the time out in order to get all the details right. It's not difficult, anyone can do it, just don't expect the first machine you buy to end up looking absolutely mint. I always say buy the best you can without going over your price, but don't buy the cheapest thing you can because it normally ends up biting you on the arse…

17 "Fitted brand new looking 1980 lo-res RGB monitor. Had a sheet of tinted glass cut to size to form a new monitor screen, then reverse printed the missile 'base names' and high score words that should be on there. Did some subtle restoration to the original marquee as it wasn't too bad."

18 "Then after a thorough check over, I fired it up with the main boards unplugged to check all the voltages were present and cutting out when interlock switches were activated. All was well, so I took a deep breath and plugged in the main board and the monitor."

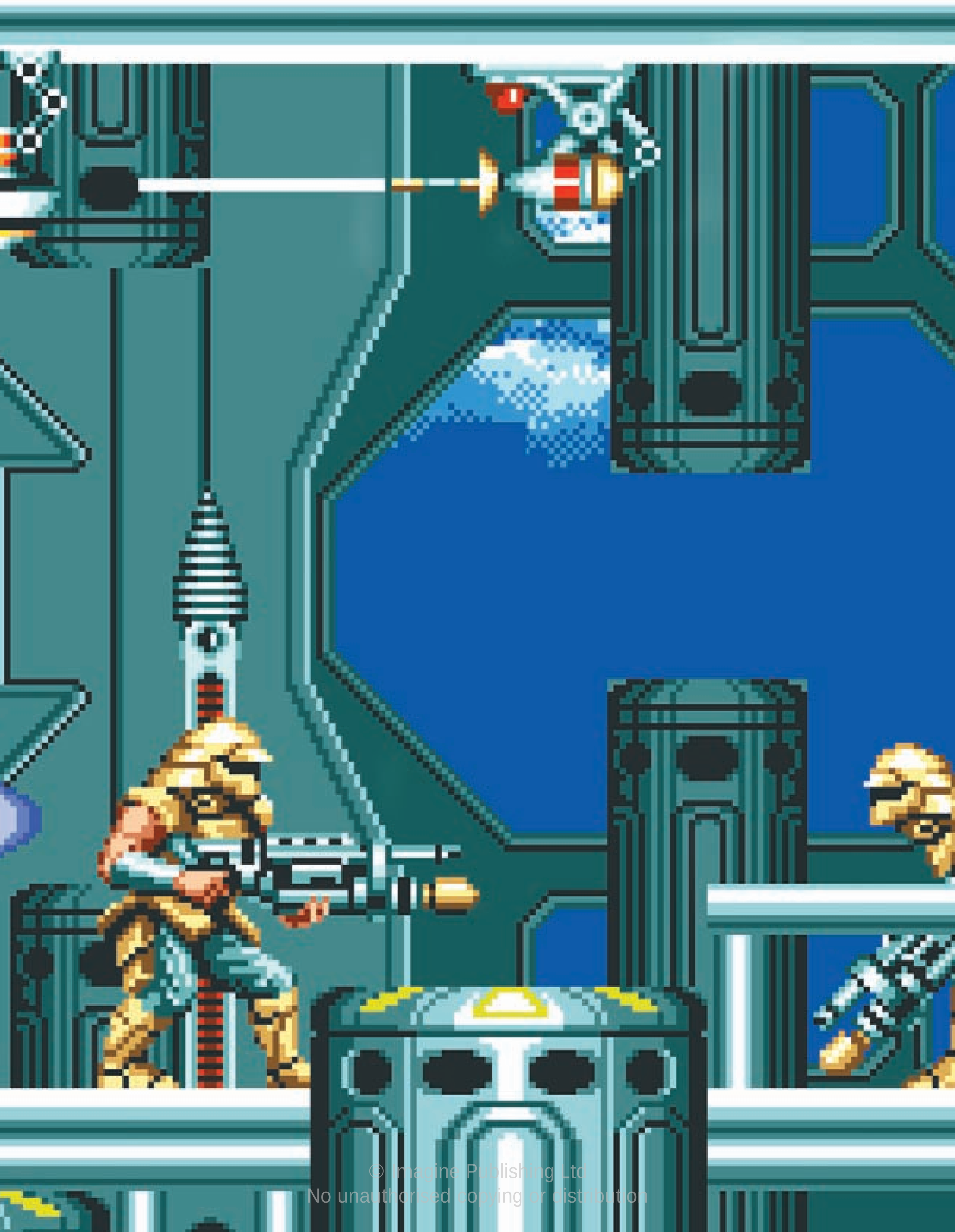
19 "Amazingly, it came to life with only a few teething problems. Promptly had a game, and adjusted the trackball bearing settings to get best weighty feel and roll. Then persuaded the lady of the house to soak test the cab, while I sat back for a gin and tonic."

20 "End result – one brand new 2005 *Missile Command* arcade game that looked like it rolled out of Atari's Californian production facility yesterday. Possibly even better because it was hand made all over. Oh, and Tony has now beaten his world high-score record…"





Purple – it's the new black for ninjas **Strider – Mega Drive [Capcom] 1989**



CLASH OF THE TITANS

R•E•N•E•G•A•D•E

As gaming infiltrated the home market a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre, machine or even developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all that opposed him. First recorded in playgrounds in the early Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine, or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month it's the 8-bit computer versions of the superb Taito coin-op hit *Renegade*.

ROUND 1: VISUALS

COMMODORE 64: To be honest, this isn't very good at all. While the backgrounds are reasonably okay, the actual sprites appear to have graduated from Lego University. Everything is blockier than a *Breakout* level and this gives the game a cutesy look that doesn't sit well with the violent action. Still, it gets extra points for the amusingly surprised expression of the main character.

SPECTRUM: This is a little better; while there's still a slight cartoony feel to the game, everything looks a lot tidier, with more detailed sprites and some surprisingly good animation. Sadly, the Renegade himself moves around ridiculously slowly and gives the impression that you're fighting unseen elements as well as vicious opponents.

AMSTRAD: Not only does *Renegade* look fantastic, it's also one of the strongest conversions we've seen on the CPC. Detailed sprites capture the gritty ambience of the original game and look utterly superb. You can even enter a code so that the blue blood can be changed to a much more satisfying claret.

WINNER: AMSTRAD
RUNNER UP: SPECTRUM

ROUND 2: AUDIO

COMMODORE 64: Normally we'd expect the C64 to absolutely storm this section. Not today, though, as *Renegade* is rather disappointing on the ears. It lacks the aural punch of many C64 titles, and while the tunes are faithful to the original game, they just don't excite us that much. Even the spot effects are rather lame, so it's a thumbs down for the sound.

SPECTRUM: Considering the machine's audio limitations the Spectrum incarnations of *Renegade*'s tunes are actually pretty damn good. They zip along at an up-tempo pace and perfectly capture the spirit of the original tunes. Even the so-so spot effects are a lot better than the C64's efforts, so the Spectrum bags itself a respectable second place. So that means that first place goes to…

AMSTRAD: The Amstrad gets full marks for the second category running. Not only are the many tunes top notch, but the sound effects are as brutal as possible. From simple smacks in the face to the wince-inducing knee to the groin when you grab a stunned opponent, everything sounds bloody brilliant.

WINNER: AMSTRAD
RUNNER UP: SPECTRUM

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

COMMODORE 64: Everyone hated *Renegade*'s control system when the game first came out because it was ridiculously hard to play with keys; it perfectly mimicked its arcade parent and required you to use three buttons to execute all your kicks, jumps and punches. Providing you had a joystick with sticky feet, though, it wasn't too much of a problem. If only the gameplay wasn't so sluggish...

SPECTRUM: It was great fun in its day but *Renegade* is now laboriously slow to play through and crawls along at a snail's pace. While it gains extra points for being much simpler to play (there was only one fire button so you could easily play it with just a joystick) its crippling pace and stodgy controls now kill it.

AMSTRAD: Yet another win for the CPC 464. The first thing you notice is just how quickly everything runs. Even now, your Renegade dashes around like the man on a mission that he so obviously is and while it features the same control issues as the C64 (which weren't really 'issues' anyway) it's helped by much more precise controls and that fast pace.

WINNER: AMSTRAD
RUNNER UP: C64

AND THE WINNER IS...

AMSTRAD

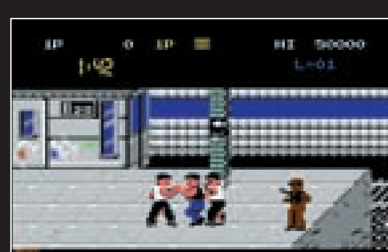
The Amstrad emerges the unlikely winner. As with *Gryzor*, talented programmers proved that when there was a decent team behind the product, Alan Sugar's computer could do a hell of a lot more than just host half-hearted ports of Spectrum games. A first-class conversion and a very worthy winner.

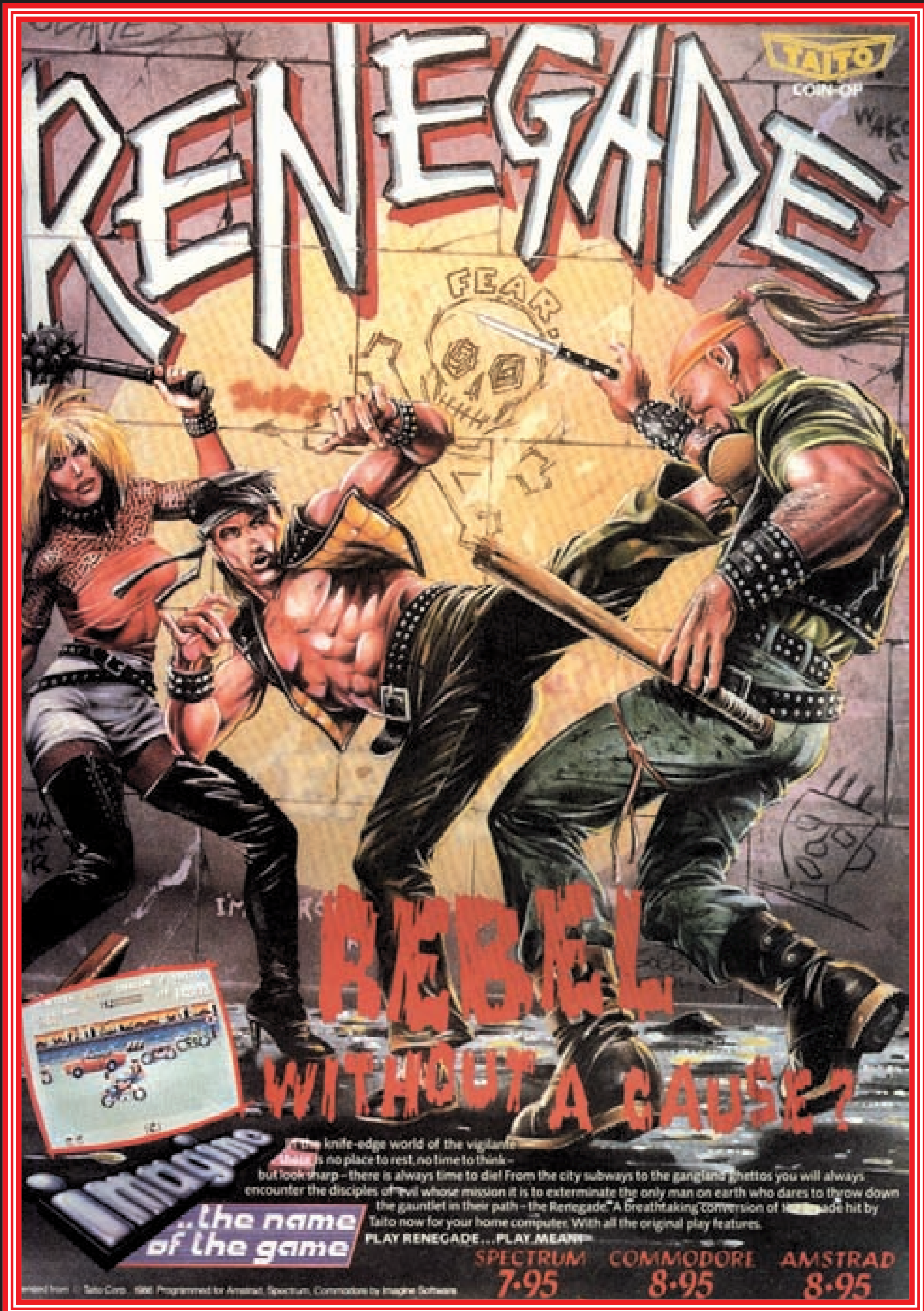


The Amstrad version (above) wins by a country mile.



The Commodore (below) turned in a rather sub-par performance.





RENEGADE (Various Home Systems) Imagine, 1987 – UK advertisement

100 GREATEST RETRO GAMES

Retro Feature

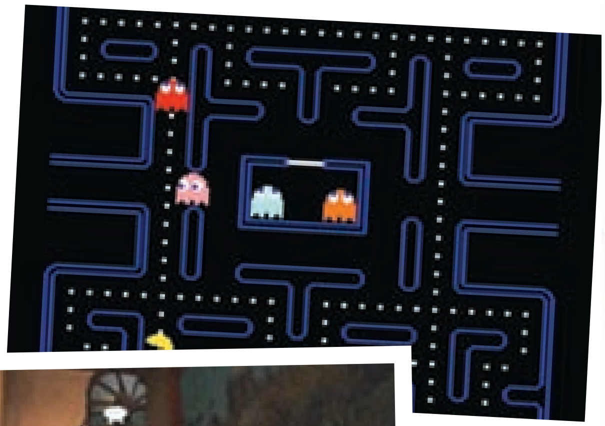
PART 1 100-51

The votes have been counted and the results are in...

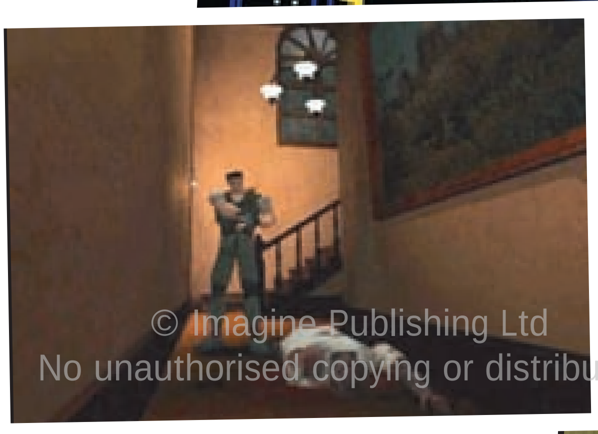
Everyone has an opinion on this almost indefinable question: what is the greatest retro videogame of all time? The possibilities, as they say, are endless, and so in the spirit of democracy, we threw it open to you, dear friends, to come up with the answer. No rules, no agendas, no pre-determined results, we just gave you the chance to write in or go online and reveal the games you love. Then our voting goblins emptied the ballot box and came up with this definitive list.

Naturally, there are going to be a few surprises, but we don't want to spoil the surprise. And we should point out that attempts to cheat were intercepted – yes, Matthew Smith (who voted for all his own games), that means you.

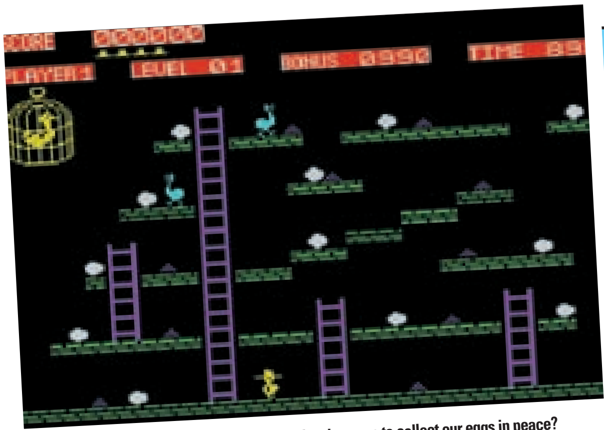
So without further ado, we give you the countdown from 100 to 51. Remember, don't shoot the messenger – it's YOUR list. Enjoy.











Oh those damn monsters, why won't they leave us to collect our eggs in peace? Good job I'm wearing my lucky hat, isn't it?

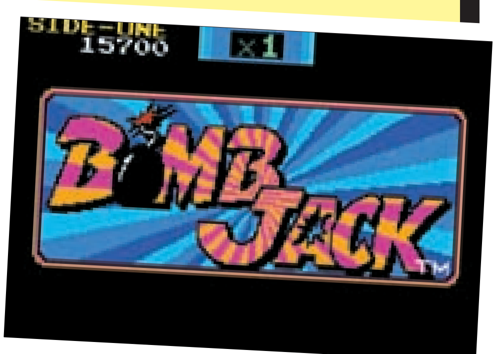
100 Chuckie Egg

In the early Eighties, it was *Chuckie Egg* that proved to be the big home computer phenomenon. Originally released for the BBC, Dragon and Spectrum formats, the game soon spawned versions for everything from the Commodore 64 to the MSX.

The gameplay is simple: players take on the role of Harry, who needs to collect all of the eggs spread around each level. Your main foes are a bunch of patrolling hens, and the screens are littered with stacks of seeds which can be devoured for more points. One of the earliest platform romps, *Chuckie Egg* remains one of the most loved moments in home computing.

99 Bombjack

You have two objectives: avoid the floating monsters and collect the bombs that fill the screen. One bomb at a time has a lit fuse and you get a bonus for collecting them all, which is tough thanks to the slow but resourceful foes. Luckily, in a similar fashion to *Pac-Man's* Power Pills, Bombjack can grab a special ball to freeze the action, allowing you to defeat monsters by touching them. The most memorable thing about this great game is the colourful background pictures – who can forget that classic rendition of the Sphinx?



Few games can claim to be as explosive as this one – and very few are as eye-bleedingly colourful too.



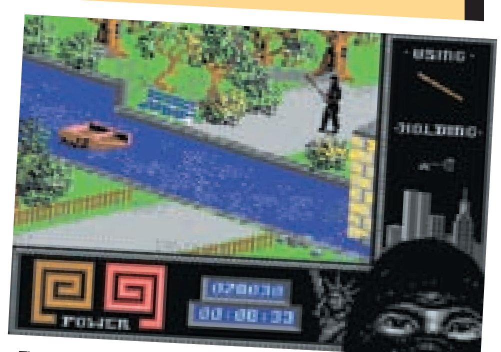
Ladies and gentlemen, the most entertaining rabbit in videogame history is here to dance and sing for your delectation!

98 Vib Ribbon

Often the simplest ideas are the best, and *Vib Ribbon* is a case in point. Control the dancing rabbit as he moves along wiggling lines… that's it. Still, the magic of *Vib Ribbon* is that you can insert your own CDs into the PlayStation and Vibri will dance with varying levels of difficulty. Make a mistake and Vibri devolves into a tiny worm, fail again and it's game over. Trust us, once you've encountered *Vib Ribbon*, you'll want to go through your entire record collection to see how Vibri performs to your favourite tunes.

97 Last Ninja 2

In terms of subtitles, *Last Ninja 2: Back With A Vengeance* really laid on the line that this was more than a cheap sequel. Whereas the original took place in Ninth Century Japan, the sequel transported master ninja Armakuni to 20th Century New York (something about a blinding light that sped him through time or something…). The isometric viewpoint gives *Last Ninja 2* a stylised look, and as well as adding new weapons to the mix, it added new adventure-style elements and devilish puzzles. C64 gaming at its best.



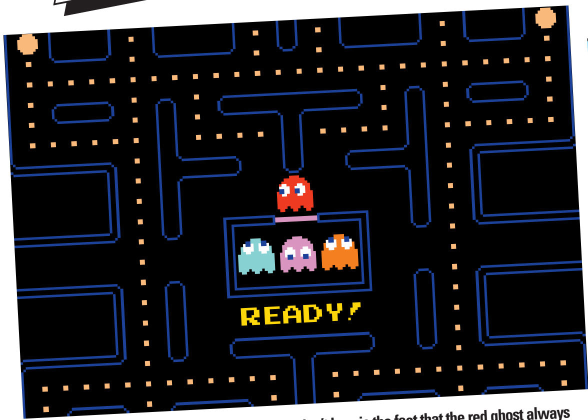
The world's greatest ninja can also multi-task; here he manages to carry a stick while holding a key. What a guy.

96 Perfect Dark

Crowning moments – anyone who still believed Nintendo was only about 'kiddy games' was silenced with this stylish and violent adult adventure. Another triumph for the seemingly unstoppable Rare, *Perfect Dark* is often seen as the unofficial sequel to *GoldenEye 007* as, although it doesn't feature the smarmy super-spy, it does feature a similar playing style and, in fact, uses an improved version of the *007* engine. Actually, *Perfect Dark* squeezed so much into the N64 that an expansion pack was needed to run the game – making the price tag too hefty for many gamers, which may explain why *Perfect Dark*, while still fêted by gamers, never achieved the iconic status of Rare's other works.



Sneaking around has never been so much fun, especially when it leads to shooting someone in the head and watching them die.



Oh Pac-Man, how we love thee. What we don't love is the fact that the red ghost always knows exactly where we are.

95

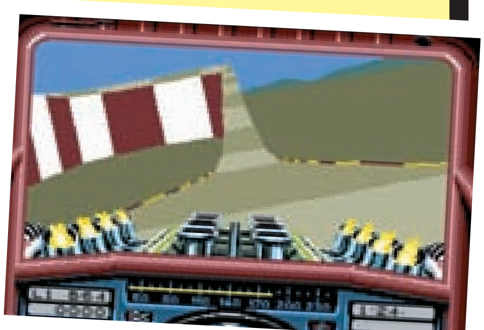
Pac-Man

A bonefide arcade classic and one of the iconic titles that truly kickstarted the videogames revolution. If you've been unfortunate enough to have been living in a cave for the last 25 years and don't know the premise of *Pac-Man*, it revolves around exploring a maze while ghosts try to stop you eating all of the dots on the screen. Eat a powerpill and the hunter becomes the hunted with our hero able to chomp the evil ghosts. For the first time ever, in 1999 Billy Mitchell achieved a perfect *Pac-Man* score of 3,333,360 achieved by eating all the blue ghosts, every bonus and all the dots, over a massive 256 levels.

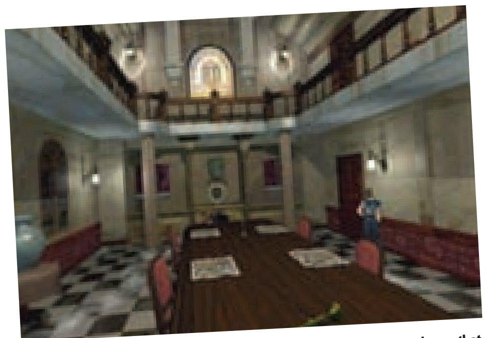
94

Stunt Car Racer

This Amiga favourite added new depth to the racing genre by presenting racers with an environment where you experienced a great height and depth rather than the usual 'racing forwards toward the finishing line'. Yes, today we might be used to such graphical brilliance but in the late Eighties, this undulation was revolutionary, there was a real sense of danger as you raced up and down tracks that resembled twisted rollercoasters.



Fasten your seatbelt, slam your foot down on the accelerator and get set to hit the ramps. Guaranteed to make you car sick.



Whenever you find yourself exploring an ageing mansion, you just know that something really bad is about to happen to you.

93

Resident Evil

The market might be saturated with Survival Horror games these days, but when *Resident Evil* arrived, it was a new and terrifying gaming experience. It uses spine tingling psychological horror which plays with your mind and makes sure that every creaking door that you open leaves you dreading what might be on the other side. Anyone who has not experienced the thrill of jumping out of your skin as zombie dogs leap through the window really hasn't lived. Even with its age, we still have to play the original *Resi* with the lights on…

92

Wave Race 64

An early example of what the N64 was capable of, *Wave Race 64* has rarely been matched for beautiful water effects coupled with rewarding gameplay. The thing that made the game so tricky was the changing tides, yes, just like in the real sport the wave patterns are different every time and so unlike road-based racers, even if you learn the course, it doesn't mean you'll automatically be able to take the flag. Excellent graphics, excellent sound effects and a multiplayer to die for, this is Nintendo at its very best.

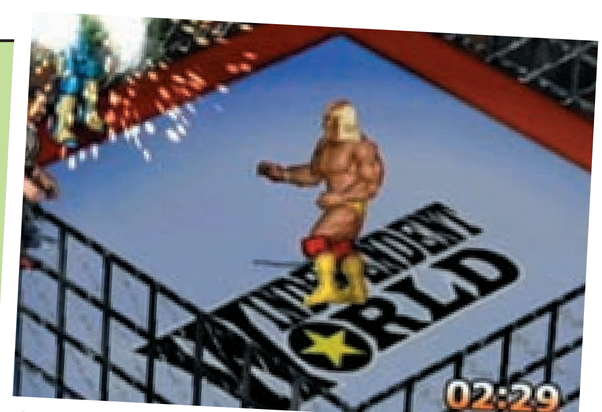


It's a bit like your classic racing game, but without roads. Or cars. Actually, it's nothing like a normal racing game.

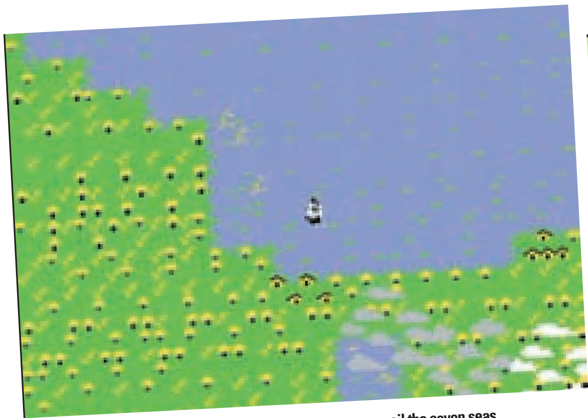
91

Fire Pro Wrestling D

Before *Smackdown* took over the genre, it was the *Fire Pro* series that ruled the wrestling roost and, indeed, it seems this Dreamcast incarnation is still the best of the best. While parts of the game (the highly impressive wrestler entrances, for example) are in 3D, the main game uses 2D effectively and stylishly. Brilliantly animated, the game also offers grapplers a number of modes ranging from an insane Battle Royal to a one-on-one face off. The game also scores by offering more insane Japanese styles of matches such as the Exploding Cage and Barbed Wire options. In terms of gameplay and pure wrestling fun, *Fire Pro Wrestling D* on the Dreamcast has yet to be beaten.



Keep saying your prayers and eating your vitamins and one day you might get to step into the squared circle against this behemoth.



Ahoy there, me hearties. Come join us as we sail the seven seas. Yo ho ho, a pirate's life for me. Arrr…

90 Pirates!

While *Pirates!* was originally spawned on the Commodore 64, it is the Amiga version that most people remember most fondly. The game straddled pretty much every genre, but was, at heart, a role-playing adventure where you had to get yourself a fearsome reputation as the scurviest sea dog on the high seas. It's not all about talking and scheming though, there's plenty of action to be had including bloody sword fights (whether it be a rapier or your common longsword, you could cause serious injury) or fights against other boats. All the time you must also try and accrue as much swag as possible. The perfect balance of strategy and action, *Pirates!* was another Sid Meier triumph.

89 Vandal Hearts

Although it does have all of the hallmarks of a Square classic videogame, *Vandal Hearts,* in actual fact, hails from Konami and is a turn-based masterpiece which keeps you coming back for more, even in spite of the initially complex scenarios.

Vandal Hearts rewards gamers who don't just jump straight into the action – planning your attack before you begin moving your squad achieves far better results and means that you might actually live to see the next map.

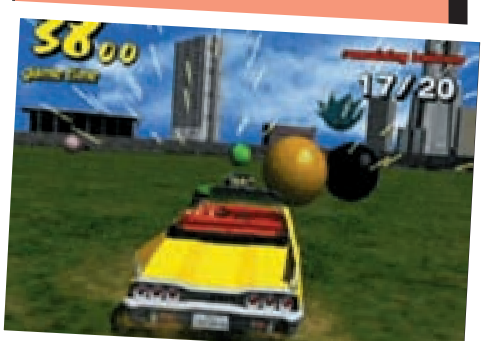
Special mention should go to the epic soundtrack and genuinely excellent sound effects in *Vandal Hearts* which helped to create one of the original PlayStation's deepest gaming pleasures.



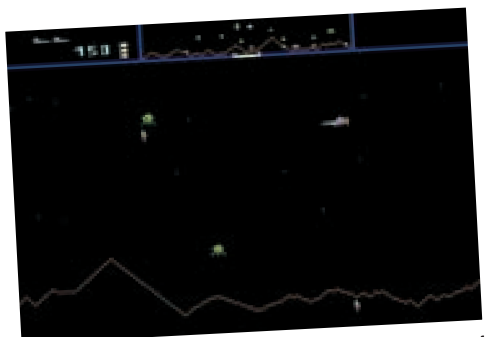
The RPG world in excelsis. There's fire, there's quirky and bizarre characters, there's a compass we can't follow and there's POWERFUL MAGIC.

88 Crazy Taxi

Sega's expertise for creating classic arcade games gave us *Crazy Taxi,* a simple idea that really caught the imagination of arcade-goers. And the idea really is simple: traverse the town, picking up fares and driving them to their destinations before the time runs out. That's it. But, by god was it addictive – a great example of the 'just one more go' syndrome. *Crazy Taxi* was one of the Dreamcast's greatest achievements, and of course there would be later versions.



We've been in the car with some reckless and blatantly crazy taxi drivers in our time, but none as mental as this guy.



If ever a single screenshot could bring back a multitude of happy memories of life down at the arcade, then this is the one.

87 Defender

This 25 year-old space adventure revolutionised the shoot-'em-up. It featured a horizontal scrolling environment full of aliens to defeat and humans to save. Created by Eugene Jarvis, rumour has it that the industry expected it to fail, but history has proved them wrong and *Defender* is up there with *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* .

Just don't bother with the updated next-generation incarnations which do their best to taint the legacy…

86 Atic Atac

Another example of Ultimate ruling the adventure genre, *Atic Atac* was one of the Spectrum's most colourful adventures. Finding yourself locked in a castle, you must find the golden key and escape. Sound easy? It isn't. The castle is massive and there are all kinds of ghouls and trapdoors to hamper your progress. You also need a supply of food at all times, so as well as finding your way around, you need to use food sparingly. Far from easy, but close to perfect.



Why is it that trap doors always have a nasty creature stirring below? And how come gamers still can't resist opening them?



There weren't that many games that made the Saturn worth buying, but *Guardian Heroes* is one of them.

85 Guardian Heroes

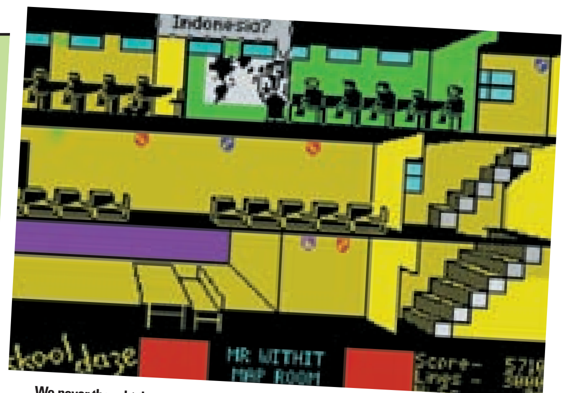
Another in the oh-too-rare series of Games For Saturn Owners To Be Smug About, *Guardian Heroes* is a deep and entertaining RPG from the legendary Treasure Studio. The story is classic role-playing fare, involving an enchanted sword that must be protected at all costs from a powerful sorceror intent on taking over the world.

While at its heart *Guardian Heroes* is an RPG, it also delves heavily into the fighting genre, at times coming across as a more mystical *Final Fight*. The enemies throughout are intelligent and challenging, and the number of different endings and unlockable secrets make *Guardian Heroes* one of the machine's finest titles.

84 Skool Daze

Microsphere's *Skool Daze* hit the Spectrum in 1985, and the tale of troublesome schoolboy Eric soon caught the imagination of gamers everywhere. You are required to steal your report card from the school safe, but first you must find out the four numbers that make up the safe's combination by knocking out the teachers who hold the secrets. Tricky, and made even more so by your fellow students who range from the class swot who will report anything you do wrong, to the school bully who aims to get you blamed for everything.

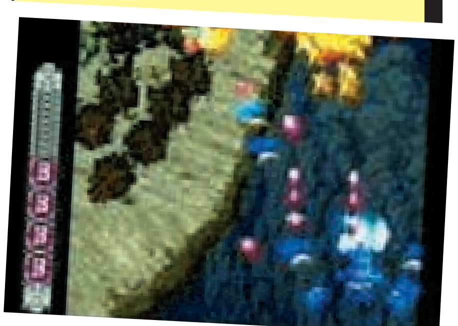
Special mention should also go out to the equally revered (although curiously missing from this list) *Skool Daze* sequel, *Back To Skool*.



We never thought that we would want to go back to school, but *Skool Daze* somehow managed to sway us.

83 DoDonPachi

One of the most insane and brain-melting arcade shooters ever, *DoDonPachi* is one of Atlus' greatest triumphs. Unleashed in 1997, the game is a sequel to 1995's *DonPachi* and takes the intense shooting action of the original to another level. Choosing from three different ships, each with its own shooting style, gamers of any ability can dive straight in. Most noteworthy is the scoring: a guage increases every time an enemy is killed, so blowing things up in quick succession is the way to big points.



There are only two rules with this game: keep your finger on the trigger and don't blink. Oh and try not to die. Hang on, that's three rules.



Gentlemen, start your engines. Come on, start your engines and stop staring at that lady's skimpy outfit.

82 Ridge Racer

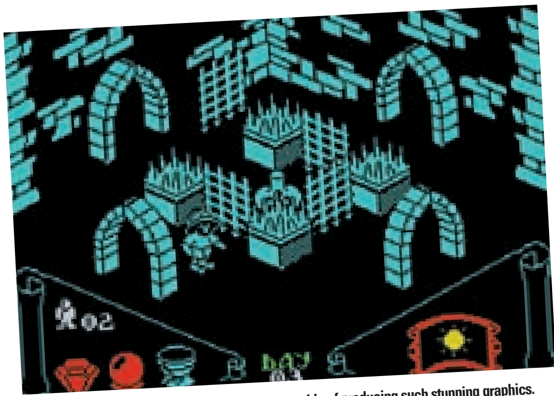
The racing game that launched a thousand PlayStations, *Ridge Racer* remains an arcade-style delight. Yes, as much as we like *Gran Turismo*'s sim style, there's nothing as exciting as speeding round the imaginary courses in Namco's stylish racer. Using fantasy cars and environments, *Ridge Racer* is challenging and crazy. It oozes style, and the fact that the recent Xbox 360 boasts a new edition in the series proves there's plenty of life in the franchise yet, even though we'll never be as surprised as we were by the original.

81 Pokémon Red/Blue

It's strange to think that there was a time when kids weren't obsessed with Pikachu and pals as the phenomenon that is Pokémon became as tied to Nintendo as Mario. The games unite familiar RPG elements with a simple fighting system, meaning that gamers of all ages can easily follow the action. With the *Red* and *Blue* versions offering different Pokémon to capture, Nintendo doubled its profits and we all know what happened after that.



Remember the days before *Pokémon*? We think we do, but it might just be our fertile imaginations.



Many thought that the Spectrum was not capable of producing such stunning graphics. *Knightlore* made them eat their words with a massive isometric spoon.

80

Knightlore

A game that can truly be defined as revolutionary, *Knightlore* really showed what the Spectrum was capable of in terms of graphics, using an isometric viewpoint that simply took gamers' breath away.

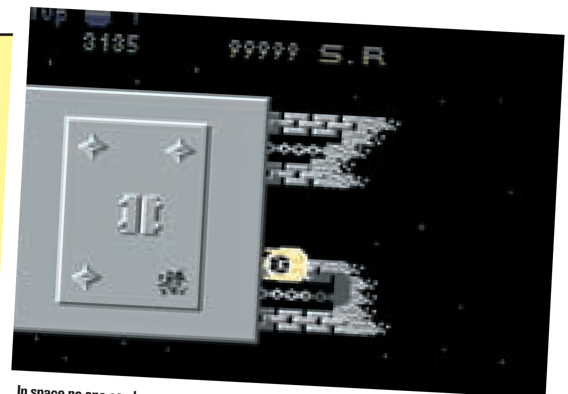
As well as the stunning graphics, *Knightlore* had enough gameplay to keep you glued to the keyboard as your half-human half-wolf character searched for a wizard who could break the spell and stop you becoming a fully fledged werewolf. It's not worth thinking about how much of our lives we lost to this Ultimate classic or, indeed, any of its other adventure titles…

79

Uridium

When it comes to shoot-'em-ups that have really impressed us down the years, for the Commodore 64, it has to be *Uridium* that holds the title. The gameplay is similar to arcade classics such as *Zaxxon,* and the ship's ability to spin 180 degrees means that *Uridium* offers much more in the way of movement than many of the shooters of the day, and definitely pushed the hardware to its limit. The game was programmed by Andrew Braybrook, the man behind *Paradroid,* and plays beautifully even today.

Fly through space, shoot anything that moves, repeat to fade, even the most hardcore of gamers found *Uridium* one of the greatest challenges of the era. Brilliant and exciting…



In space no one can hear you scream. Or blast your way past anything stupid enough to get in your way. Fingers on the trigger…

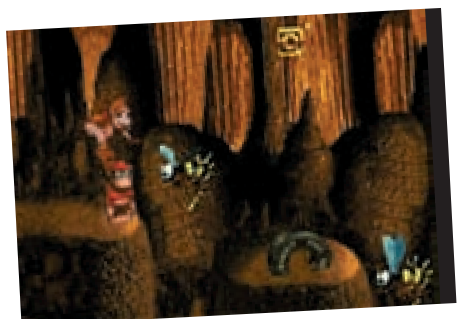
78

Streets Of Rage

***Streets Of Rage* is the most fun you can have cleaning up the streets as three vigilantes wage war on an evil syndicate intent on taking over the city.** The three begin with only their knuckles as weapons, but more effective kit is picked up as you traverse the streets. Also, if you play in two-player, instead of being the all-American hero, you can destroy your partner, kill Mr X and become the big man. Who wants to be good anyway?



You can't always beat every situation by raising your fists, remember that. Ow, stop punching me.



Who wants one monkey when you can have two? Nintendo's *Donkey Kong* brought the whole family.

77

Donkey Kong Country

Fans sat open-mouthed as some of the best visuals ever seen on a home console brought *Donkey Kong* back to centre stage for the first time in years. Like *Super Mario* before it, *DK Country* was a challenging, addictive platformer that spawned sequels still deemed brilliant enough to be resurrected on the GBA. While we love *Donkey Kong Country,* it only reminds us that you people have left the original *Donkey Kong* off this list.

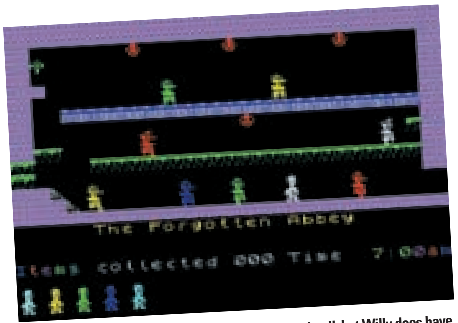
76

Shinobi

One of Sega's biggest pre-Hedgehog franchises, *Shinobi* made its arcade debut in 1987. While on the surface, it follows many classic platform dynamics, it offers innovative graphics with different layers on each level offering the chance to not only travel left to right, but 'into the screen' too. The enemies in *Shinobi* are also more intelligent than in most games of the time; learning your moves and reacting realistically rather than the 'on-rails' system that we had grown used to.



One of the arcade's greatest adventures, *Shinobi* also featured some of the most colourful enemies that we've ever seen…



He may not have much in the way of animation or detail, but Willy does have a rather spiffy hat.

Jet Set Willy

75

One of the Spectrum's most beloved platformers, *Jet Set Willy* offers a hefty challenge to this day, and its mix of exploration, item collection and wry comedy rightly struck a chord with gamers everywhere. The action takes place in the mansion of millionaire Willy who is forced by his housekeeper to tidy up after the massive party he's just held. He just wants to sleep, but its not tiredness he's up against, there are monsters, darts, pigs, you name it, Willy is up against it. Pure gaming nirvana.

Link's Awakening

74

The first *Zelda* adventure for handhelds, there was a worry that Miyamoto couldn't squeeze his creation onto the Game Boy, but he did it and *Link's Awakening* is every bit as playable as its home console incarnations. Once again we find Zelda in danger having been put to sleep, and Link must traverse the seas to set things right. Proving its excellence, the game also received a re-release on Nintendo's new Game Boy Color.


He might be in black and white, but Link still has the same amount of steely determination and attitude as on the home machines.


Even when aided by such a powerful set of armour, the world's greatest heroes are all scared of bats. They're like rats. With wings.

Turrican

73

***Turrican* was certainly a high point in terms of graphics, in fact when it was unveiled many found it hard to believe that the colourful adventure was running on the home computer.** Later versions had even more impressive visuals and soundtracks. Gameplay-wise, it's similar to the arcade blasting action of *Contra* – but with more adventure elements – players are rewarded for exploring rather than just blasting through to the end. The game received many sequels, the best of which was *Super Turrican* on the SNES.



In the future, all races will look like this. It might not be quite so colourful though, but we are sure that there will be flying cars.

F-Zero

72

Taking racing into the future, Nintendo unleashed *F-Zero* in the early Nineties and it soon sped to the front of the racing game grid. As well as fast-paced gameplay, *F-Zero* boasted some stunning effects thanks to its use of Mode 7 technology, which created rotation and scaling effects that had never been seen in the home before.

This gave the game a simulated 3D environment, making others in the genre at the time seem flat by comparison. Of course the *F-Zero* franchise was resurrected to show off the technology inside the Game Boy Advance too, but it's the SNES version that we all remember most fondly.



Final Fight

71

It's a side-scrolling beat-'em-up classic from Capcom that comes in at number 71. *Final Fight* gives you the choice of three fighters to take control of as you traverse the mean streets of Metro City battling an evil street gang and attempting to save the mayor's daughter who just happens to have been kidnapped by the gang's nefarious leader.

Each of the three heroes, Haggar, Cody and Guy has their own distinct strengths and weaknesses, so gamers must choose either agility or strength. Of course, *Final Fight* is most remembered for its excellent two-player mode which remains one of the most enjoyable multiplayer thrills to date. And who can resist the chance to become the hero of a city?



You can tell when the Super Hero Convention hits town as the subway is full of all kinds of crazy freaks and weirdos.



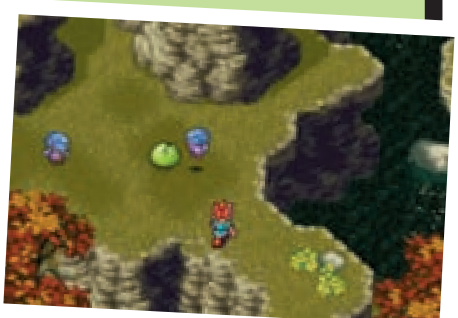
Something tells us that this will not actually be the final fantasy after all, not as long as fans keep putting their hands in their pockets.

70 Final Fantasy Tactics

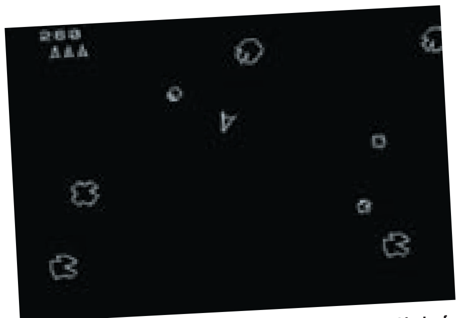
T*actics* may share the *Final Fantasy* name, but in terms of gameplay, it's a totally different animal. *Final Fantasy Tactics* features a 3D isometric playing field which can be rotated. The game plays similarly to the *Tactics Ogre* series, thanks to sharing many of the team members who worked on the classic *Quest* adventures. The story concerns the Lion War in which there is an epic power battle after the king dies leaving no heir. (A classic RPG vehicle, then). The turn-based battling system rewards players who have a clear idea of their gameplay before heading to war as certain attack types work better in different situations. The game received a much lauded resurrection recently when it re-appeared on the GBA.

69 Chrono Trigger

C*hrono Trigger* helped revolutionise the genre by including different endings depending upon the character's actions. The innovative battle system has been copied since, but rarely bettered. The story concerned a group of time travellers attempting to save the world by visiting the past (as far back as 65,000,000 BC) as well as the future. Starting life as a Super Nintendo favourite, *Chrono Trigger* was later reborn on the PSone.



As with pretty much every RPG out there, *Chrono* Trigger features not only expansive environments, but also impressive haircuts.



Oh the tension as one massive asteroid splits, only to create a multitude of smaller but equally deadly obstacles.

68 Asteroids

This classic space shooter sees you flying through an asteroid field, blasting debris that gets in your way. Upon hitting an asteroid it explodes into smaller pieces, making the field even more dangerous. Your ship shoots forward, so you have to rotate it to destroy asteroids. You also have the ability to Hyper Space if things get hairy – this can cause problems as you never know where you'll respawn. *Asteroids* was such a success that the cash boxes within the machines had to be made bigger as the they would often overflow.

67 Boulder Dash

It's unlikely that you went through your youth without coming across *Boulder Dash*. The game revolves around our hero Rockford and his attempts to dig through mines, collecting precious gems. As well as avoiding various creatures, he must make sure he doesn't get stuck under rocks or gems. *Boulder Dash* is such a simple idea, brilliantly executed. As well as being a classic Spectrum and 64 title, it's one of only a handful of games that went from home machines to the arcade rather than the other way around.

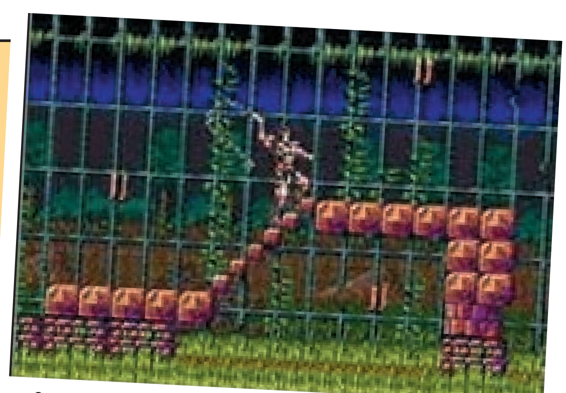


The further underground you go, the more treasure you'll find. But you're also more likely to get crushed under a rock.

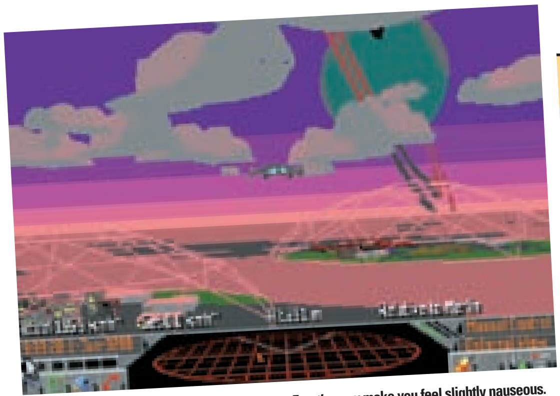
66 Super Castlevania IV

When the *Castlevania* series made its SNES debut, fans were treated to the most epic and cinematic entry in the popular series so far. All the classic ingredients are here – the sweeping soundtrack, the old castle, vines and skeletons. Now, however, the backgrounds move and spin, the cameras focus in on the drama and the environments are more detailed than they've ever been.

It would be fair to point out that for most fans of the series, it is *Super Castlevania IV* and the original PlayStation's *Symphony Of The Night* that are the most revered, but surprisingly *Super Castlevania IV* is the only one to feature in our list.



Our intrepid hero defies all the laws of the world by trying to go up the down escalator. While carrying a whip.



Warning: Due to the excessive use of colour, *Frontier* may make you feel slightly nauseous. Just don't throw up on the keyboard, alright?

65 Frontier

That wonderful old adage that 'good things come to those who wait' certainly applies to *Frontier*, the eagerly anticipated sequel to the home computer classic *Elite*. Still, fans of the original kept the faith and *Frontier* surpassed all sales expectations when it arrived late in 1993.

The open-ended gameplay experience of *Frontier* means that gamers of all abilities can enjoy the stunning work of David Braben. The game starts you off in your run of the mill, average ship and through trading you must improve your standing and your craft. This amount of choice and fun stands out especially. If you want to kill you can, if you want to protect you can, in the expansive world of *Frontier*, anything is possible.

64 Space Harrier

***Space Harrier* began life as an arcade title, and as well as being a superb game was noted for the cabinet design which allowed gamers to sit down.** The machine would move around as you played (don't worry, there was a safety belt for when things got hairy).

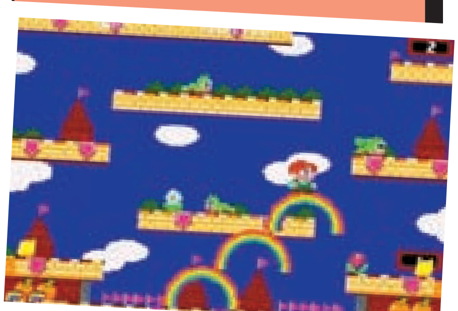
The game features some of the most colourful graphics of the era and the surreal world of dragons and aliens that comprised the 'Fantasy Zone' provided an exciting and dizzying shoot-'em-up adventure. The game appeared on most home formats, but special mention should go to the Master System which got not only a decent arcade conversion but also a 3D edition. Gameplay is simple, but by the end you need to employ fast reflexes.



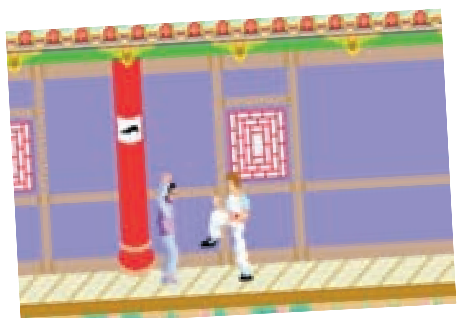
A cool hero, a one-eyed dinosaur mammoth thing, robots with big guns, how many games can boast all of these?

63 Rainbow Islands

The intrepid heroes of *Bubble Bobble* return in this much-loved sequel that sees Bub and Bob rescuing the Rainbow Islands. The secret to victory here is creating rainbows which you can then jump on to reach greater heights to attack enemies. The levels are based upon some of Taito's greatest hits including *Arkanoid* and *Darius*. *Rainbow Islands* is a challenge with extremely tough bosses – despite the cutesy look, this is one tough cookie.



Could this be the cutest screenshot we have ever printed? Could be. Still, the game is deceptively challenging…



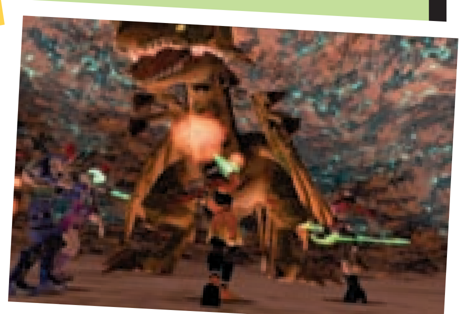
That's right, just stand there, put your hands into the air and let me kick you in the stomach. Take that, evil guy.

62 Kung Fu Master

Typical, you take your girlfriend out for a stroll, then the next thing you know she's been captured by a mysterious Mr X and it's up to you to fight ninjas to win her back. You must make your way to the Devil's Temple and survive five floors of perilous danger. Your prize for defeating every foe on the floor is a tricky boss battle; defeat them, and you can ascend to the next floor before your eventual meeting with Mr X. Classic fighting action.

61 Phantasy Star Online

Released in Europe in 2001, *Phantasy Star Online* allows for four-player online action with fully customisable characters. A keyboard was released for the Dreamcast, which was perfect for *PSO* – there was also an on-screen keyboard as well as a number of pre-determined phrases for lazy gamers. Following the demise of Sega's dream machine, the series has turned up on GameCube and Xbox as well as the Game Boy Advance.



Look, I know you're probably a little annoyed about being attacked, but you're a giant dragon, we HAVE to kill you.



While he might not be quite as famous as Mario, Wonderboy is certainly up there with the plumber in the platform hero stakes.

Wonderboy III

60

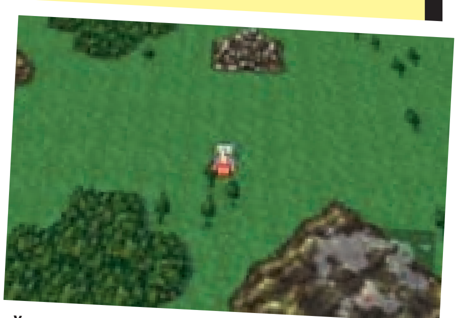
This is actually two games, and seeing as how votes did not specify which, we will have to doff our caps to both *Wonderboy III: The Monster's Lair* and also *Wonderboy III: The Dragon's Trap*.

Monster's Lair was the real third game in the series and as well as the usual *Wonderboy* ideas of running and jumping, it was also a side-scrolling shooter, confused? Many were. Then came, er, another third instalment, *The Dragon's Trap*. This time the game was a 'proper' sequel to *Super Wonderboy* in *Monster World* and features the same kind of gameplay seen in that classic adventure. One twist was the ability to change into various types of animals each of which had their own unique strengths.

Final Fantasy VI

59

***Final Fantasy VI* tells the tale of a world almost wiped out, and sees magic being phased out and technology ruling all.** This being *Final Fantasy*, a group is bringing magic back to the land and with it gaining the power… The title's misleading, as in the US this was *Final Fantasy 3* when released on the SNES whereas in Blighty we had to wait until it was released years later on the PSone. Still, it was worth the wait and remains a high point of the series.



Yes, we know it looks safe now, but we've played enough *Final Fantasy* to know there are monsters lurking nearby…



This remains one of the most stylish games we have ever played and regularly gets resurrected on our Dreamcast to this day.

Jet Set Radio

58

A Dreamcast cult treat with edge and attitude setting it apart from Sega's family orientated offerings. Released today, the moral majority – and Jack Thompson – would be all over *Jet Set Radio* as the story sees you skating around, marking the city with your graffiti tag as the police try to take you down. As well as innovative gameplay and an awesome soundtrack, *Jet Set Radio* employs cel-shading, giving it the futuristic look that the story dictates. The series wasn't continued before the death of the Dreamcast, but it was resurrected on Xbox.

Street Fighter 3

57

How do you follow up the zillion incarnations of *Street Fighter II*? Simple. Make the action more explosive and add elements such as new characters. As well as some brilliant fighting action, the game includes bonus stages which require you to smash up cars, or perform moves with basketballs. Ace animations and varied moves make this one of the best fighters out there and yet another triumph for Capcom's winning series.



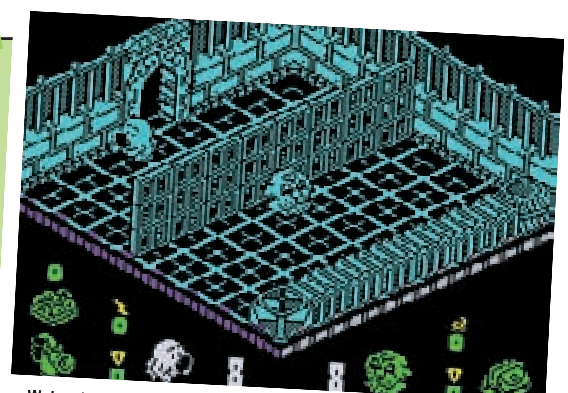
Press X, Press X, Press X, Press X, Left, Left, Right, Up, Down, Left, Left, X, Down, Right. FIREBALL!

Head Over Heels

56

The isometric brilliance of *Head Over Heels* is remembered as one of the Spectrum's finest moments. Never before did we have the chance to take control of two canine heroes, each with their own useful and unique abilities. To solve the puzzles, the dogs occasionally have to be combined, while at other times players need to work out which of the two has the ability to clear the screen. Often there are jumps that only Head can make, whereas Heels is the best for speed. Swapping between the two soon becomes second nature and there are few out there who will rest until all the puzzles have been solved.





We love dogs. We love games. Therefore we really love games featuring dogs, especially when they are as strange as this one…



Lock the door, turn off the clocks, hide your watch, once you start playing *StarCraft*, you may never see the real world again.

StarCraft 55

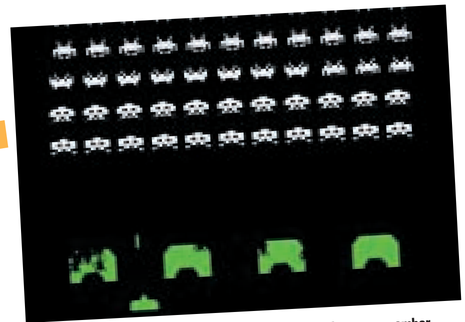
Blizzard's real-time strategy epic is one of the best-selling series of all time with over nine million copies sold since its introduction in 1998. While *StarCraft* obviously has similarities to the classic *WarCraft* series, a new game engine was created for the space adventure making this bigger and better than Blizzard's past successes. In order to gain victory in the world of *StarCraft* players must construct units and buildings and manage their resources properly as well as balancing offensive and defensive strengths.

Sensible Soccer 54

When Sensi exploded onto the Amiga and Atari ST in the early Nineties, it changed the genre forever. The tilted viewpoint differed from the topdown or sideline view that gamers were used to, editable teams meant that you could create your dream squad and, most importantly, gameplay was realistic. Nowadays it might be all *Pro Evo* vs *FIFA* but in the Nineties, *Sensible Soccer* ruled all. The question is how will the 2006 version fare? We'll see…



The action hits fever pitch as our two teams meet in the centre circle – something's about to kick off…



Where it all began, these were the first real villains we remember encountering in the arcade and they still give us nightmares.

Space Invaders 53

An unrelenting army marching towards Earth and not stopping until they've wiped out every human. *Space Invaders* was a smash hit, so much so that the US encountered a shortage of quarters as machines ate up the currency at an incredible rate. To track the game's success it's still being resurrected today with DS and PSP versions.



It might look like an out take from the Aztec Zone on *The Crystal Maze*, but it's actually another classic adventure for our hero. Not The Weakest 'Link'…

Majora's Mask 52

How do you follow up a game as perfect as *Ocarina Of Time*? Nintendo's response was Link's dark and moody return in *The Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask*. The sense of urgency throughout is palpable, with the game taking place over a three-day time frame. Like *Perfect Dark*, *Majora's Mask* uses the N64 expansion pack, giving the game a new level of graphical depth that helps increase the level of dread and suspense. By collecting masks, Link can perform tasks to help with his 72-hour quest, including the ability to spin and swim. Playing *Zelda* outside of Hyrule was a departure for the series, but *Majora's Mask* is another *Zelda* triumph and remains one of the N64's crowning moments.

Sonic The Hedgehog 51

We can't imagine a gaming landscape without Sega's mascot appearing in everything from racing games to 3D fighters. It was 1990 when Sega spawned a monster, trying to create a new mascot for the company and a character that could be as recognisable to gamers around the world as Nintendo's ubiquitous plumber. The result was Sonic, an attitude-filled animal who laid the blueprint for Crash, Blinx and a million other humourous animal heroes down the years. The original was a platformer like no other, not only was it tougher than most, it also had a sense of speed hitherto unseen. The game was an instant success, spawning sequels, spinoffs, toys, TV shows, you name it, Sega's probably stuck the hedgehog's face on it.



Damned pickpockets everywhere, that's the last time I come into town with my pockets full of swag…

Retro Feature

100 GREATEST RETRO GAMES

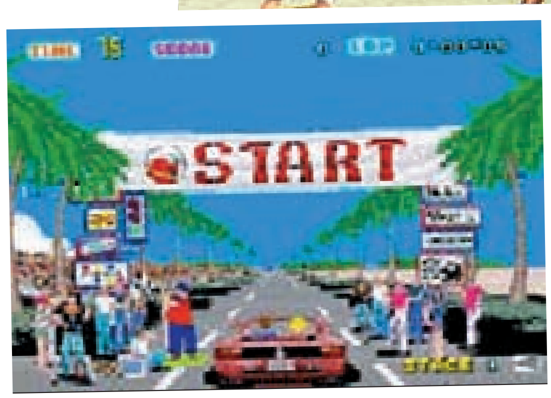
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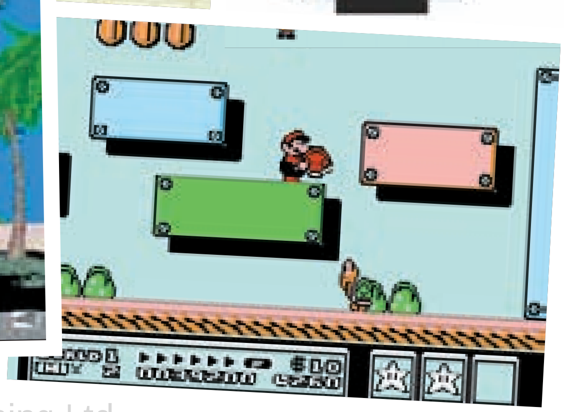
The votes have been counted and the results are in…

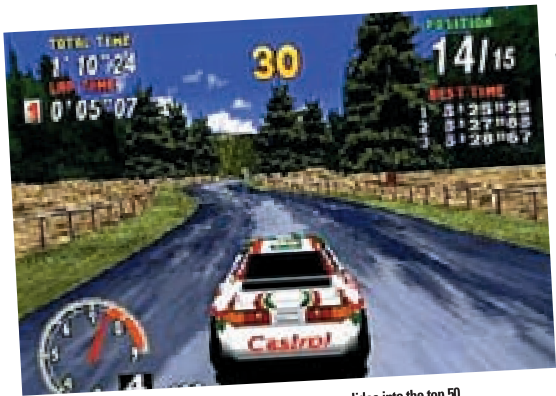
Here we are then – the final countdown of the greatest games of yesteryear as chosen by you, the readers. Of course, there are some surprising omissions from the list; we expected to see *Final Fantasy VIII, Star Wars: The Arcade Game* or *Sim City* making an appearance, but they all failed to make the final cut. So what is in the list? Games that have proved themselves timeless, games that were not only revolutionary in their day but that still offer a challenge and a hefty dose of playability today. You can expect to see plumbers, you can look forward to Link, you can anticipate James Bond and you can be prepared for 50 games that can truly be regarded as the cream of the crop. Should it be Sega or Nintendo getting those acceptance speeches ready as they carry off the title of Best Retro Game Ever? Read on and all will be revealed…











Tetsuya Mizuguchi's masterpiece powerslides into the top 50. If only all rally games were this fun.

50 Sega Rally

Long before the magical *Colin McRae* took over the rally game market, it was Sega's arcade classic that ruled the roost. Choosing from a trio of vehicles, you compete over a quartet of challenging tracks jam-packed with jumps and seemingly unbeatable bends. While today we expect rally games to all be as realistic as possible, *Sega Rally*'s focus was on fun as well as playability. The game comes into its own when two machines are linked up allowing for the ultimate in head-to-head action.

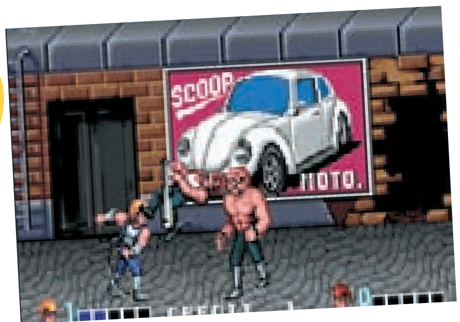
Tetsuya Mizuguchi's baby will always go down as one of the finest arcade racers of all time; beautiful graphics, sublime handling, and at the time at least, some of the most immersive gameplay available in the arcades.

49 Tomb Raider

One of the games that helped shift the original PlayStation, Lara Croft's debut adventure ushered in a new era of 'Girl Power' as our heroine travelled the world grabbing ancient treasures. Before the series was diluted with rushed and unimpressive sequels, Lara did actually spend her time raiding tombs and the puzzles were ingenious and tricky. In terms of its influence over the genre and a million substandard adventures since, *Tomb Raider* was arguably the last generation's most iconic title.



Lara's first outing was a generation defining and genre redefining work of genuine artistry.



Billy and Jimmy Lee are legends. Their scrap at the end of the game is one of gaming's all time great fights.

48 Double Dragon

Who can forget those days huddled over the arcade version of this fighting classic? The two-player action revolves around Billy and Jimmy Lee – two brothers who set off to save Billy's girlfriend from a notorious street gang. One of the finest co-operative gaming experiences ever, *Double Dragon* spawned a plethora of less-impressive sequels and even a big screen adventure, which is probably best forgotten.

47 Civilization

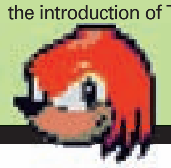
Proof, if any were needed that not all gamers are gun-obsessed psychos, and that not all software is brimming with brainless violence, *Civilization* revolves around becoming the king of the world, instead. Once you've explored and begun developing your colony, the creation starts in earnest with cities being built, different technologies brought into play and a military presence established. Basically, if it happens in the real world it happens in the game. Oh, the days we wasted playing this; we'll never get that time back.



Civilization is still going strong today; Sid Meier hit a home run when he created this little beauty.

46 Sonic & Knuckles

There's always the risk that if you try to add another major character to an iconic series, it'll water down the property. However, *Sonic* managed to pull off this trick not once but twice, first with the introduction of Tails and then with Knuckles who got top billing in this entertaining and challenging sequel. Gameplay was the same fast-paced ring collecting as before, with Robotnik attempting to acquire the biggest Chaos Emerald of them all and thus gain absolute power. A unique element of the game was the ability to combine it with your copy of *Sonic 2*, making Knuckles a playable character in the older game. Clever.





Knuckles is an echidna. And no, we have no idea what that means.



Guybrush is a legend. More funny videogame characters please.

45

The Secret Of Monkey Island 2

One of the finest adventure series of them all, the *Monkey Island* games combined devilishly intelligent puzzles with genuinely humorous dialogue. *Monkey Island 2* also features impressive, hand-painted graphics that help to bring the pirate world to life. It's the characters that make *Monkey Island 2* a classic, though, with the return of Guybrush Threepwood and the evil ghost pirate LeChuck. Add a cast of demented pirates and you have one of LucasArts' finest moments.



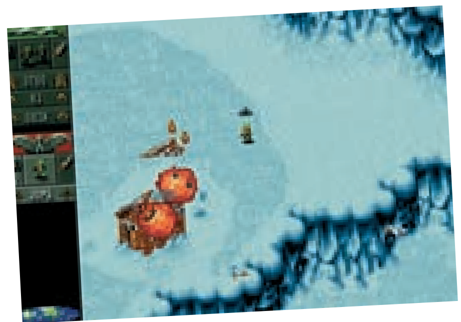
44

Chaos

A turn-based wizard adventure for the Spectrum, *Chaos* was written by Julian Gollop who later became famous for the *X-Com* series. *Chaos* sees up to eight wizards fighting it out, summoning creatures and wiping out fellow magicians. In the turn-based adventure, wizards can be controlled by humans or the computer, and each has a three-phased attack: the selection of spells, the casting of magic and the use of combat. The game was nothing special to look at, but the action was completely addictive.



Ugly game, great gameplay.
Don't judge a book by its cover.



War has never been so much fun.
Sensible Software could do no wrong.

43

Cannon Fodder

***Cannon Fodder* stands with *Lemmings* and *Worms* as one of the most revered and devilishly fun party games of all time.** Unlike the majority of war games out there, this game has its tongue firmly in its cheek at all times – and rather than having to learn strategies and plan for hours – you just send your guys in and cause instant havoc. It's fast, it's furious, it's brilliant.

42

The New Zealand Story

One of the platform games that brings a smile to the faces of an entire generation of gamers, *The New Zealand Story* remains one of Taito's finest arcade favourites. As feathered hero Tiki, you must free your friends who've been kidnapped from a New Zealand zoo by a nefarious sea lion. A classic platform adventure that uses every cliché in the book, yet still manages to be challenging and fun.

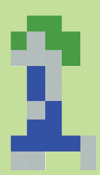


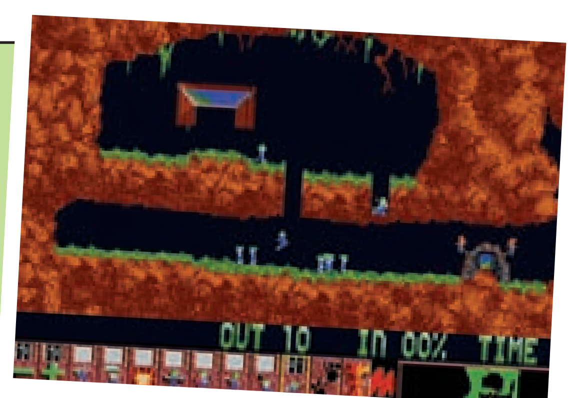
Is there a more distressing sight in videogames than watching little Tiki drown?

41

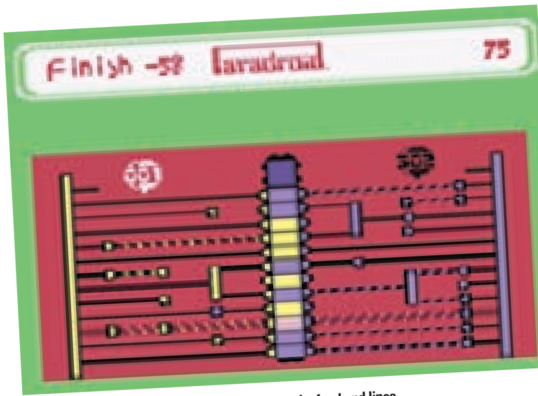
Lemmings

Is there anyone alive who hasn't wasted years of their lives trying to stop herds of little green-haired goons falling to their deaths? We imagine not. On paper the game may sound over simplistic – just keep the lemmings alive – but like all the greatest games, there are so many hidden depths here that even a decade on, you'll still discover new tactics to clear the levels. The Amiga version may remain the best-remembered, but *Lemmings* has graced pretty much every console, from the original mono Game Boy right up to Sony's PSP.





Let's go! Many hours were toiled away hunched over an Amiga with our little green-haired friends.



It may just be a bunch of red and lines, but it STILL looks nicer than *Driv3r*.

Paradroid

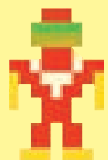
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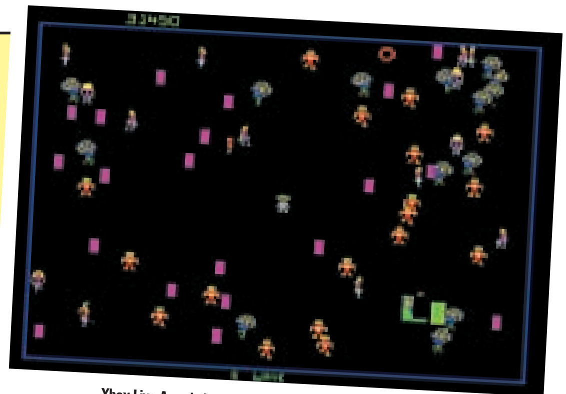
The Commodore 64 had its fair share of space adventures, but few were as deep and atmospheric as the much-loved *Paradroid*. Taking control of robots, your task is to explore spaceships and try to survive in a futuristic environment. Each space freighter is made up of sections that have to be cleared one by one and once you've eradicated all the druids in one area you move onto the next. Finally, when the whole ship is clear you're then beamed onto the next craft. A game that certainly brings back fond memories, *Paradroid* is a game that's more than simple to play but – thanks to the massive maps it includes – it isn't one you can complete in a hurry. A fact that enters it into the top half of the 100 greatest retro games today.

Robotron

39

In the middle of the arcade revolution of the early Eighties, *Robotron* arrived and blew gamers away with its fast and furious space-based action. You play as Earth's only hope against the evil Robotron and must blast at anything in sight. Luckily you're well equipped to take them on, with eight directions to fire in and an innovative two-joystick control method at your ready-and-willing fingertips. The gameplay is all about movement and finding ways to avoid the enemy who constantly spawn around you. The graphics are basic yet colourful, but overall it's the game's playability that makes *Robotron* such an iconic title.



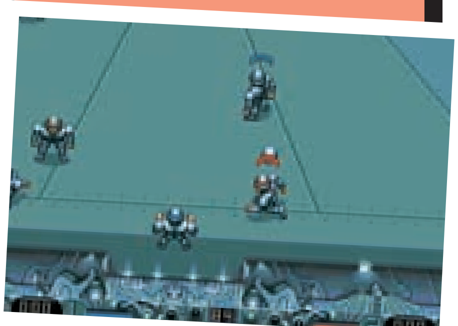


Xbox Live Arcade has seen *Robotron* given a new lease of life. Addictive as hell.

Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe

38

This *Bitmap Brothers* sequel is a sports game with a difference. Whereas many sports titles go for realism and authenticity, *Speedball 2* rewards you for taking the rulebook and throwing it out the window. It's a game where 'only the strong survive', as this futuristic league kicks off and is a case of getting the ball in the opponent's goal by any means necessary. One of the best multi player games of the Amiga era.



It's impossible to talk about *Speedball 2* without using the word 'furious'.

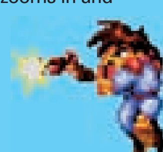


The Game Boy Advance version cannot hold a torch to this classic shooter.

Gunstar Heroes

37

Treasure's debut on the Mega Drive features some of the best graphics and gameplay ever seen on the system. Just when Nintendo fans were claiming that the Super Nintendo had pretty much finished off the Mega Drive, *Gunstar Heroes* showed what could still be done. Facing huge bosses, the camera zooms in and out creating tension as you stagger towards the climax where you try and defeat the ultimate enemy… brilliant.



Metal Slug

36

A classic *Rambo*-style story mixed with intense shooting action created one of the Neo Geo's crowning moments; the popularity of *Metal Slug* is proven by its appearance on almost every machine since. Traverse the jungles, blasting at enemy soldiers, helicopters and hulking great bosses; *Metal Slug* has it all and features a hefty amount of humour throughout to boot. Don't be fooled by the cartoony look though, this remains one tough cookie.



Fast, funny, violent and bloody hard. *Metal Slug* will never, ever fail to be awesome.



One of the few reasons to bother buying a Jaguar, *Tempest 2000* was superb.

35 Tempest 2000

There's really no way of improving upon the genius gameplay of the original *Tempest*, so for this update on the much-maligned Jaguar, Atari successfully kept the spirit of the original alive, rather than watering down the action with some sort of lame 3D update. If anything, the gameplay of *Tempest 2000* was even harder to master than in the original, with all the old enemies returning, as well as some brand new adversaries too. The biggest change to the update is the way that the whole playfield undulates and ripples, creating all kinds of bizarre effects while you play. There's also a decent two-player mode and, of course, the original arcade game is available in the package too. What more could you possibly ask for?

34 Daytona USA

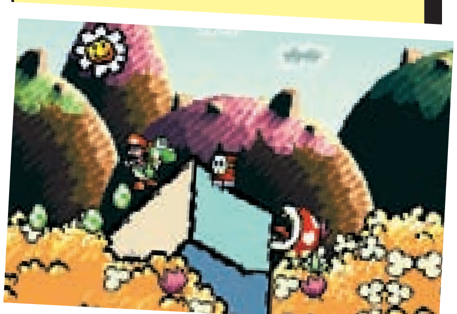
***Daytona USA* came to two separate Sega consoles – the Saturn and the Dreamcast – and remains one of its most loved racers.** The game is noted for the intelligence of fellow drivers who react to not only your driver but also other computer-controlled foes as they all jostle for the best position. While in order to win the race you'll have to avoid them, one of our best memories of the game is the multiple car pile-ups – we'd like to say that we can smile as we speed past the lumps of metal, but normally we're in amongst the debris ourselves.



Daytona still regularly pulls in the punters at Sega Parks the country over.

33 Yoshi's Island

How do you follow up one of the most revered platform adventures of all time? If you're Miyamoto, you remove the central character and let one of his faithful sidekicks take centre stage. And it worked a treat. Even though the N64 was drawing ever closer when the game was released, *Yoshi's Island* still stunned with its colourful and detailed graphics. The best thing about controlling Yoshis is that they can eat enemies and then spit them out, bringing smiles to the faces of gamers everywhere.



Quite possibly the most beautiful 2D game ever crafted.



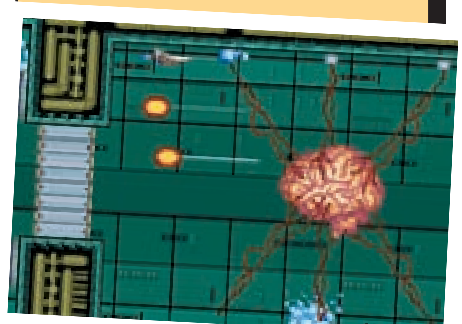
The first foray into 3D adventuring was quite an impressive achievement.

32 Dungeon Master

With your quartet of brave warriors, you journey into the dungeons and traverse the darkened corridors, fighting all kinds of creepy foes. *Dungeon Master* improves upon the combat systems of similar games of the time and the inventory system is easier to decode than others in the genre. In fact, the interfaces here influenced most titles of this sort for many years to come.

31 Gradius

Pure shoot-'em-up nirvana, *Gradius* was a mainstay of the mid-Eighties arcade and has stood the test of time more than most. Gameplay is classic 'destroy waves of enemies' fun and requires you to have cat-like reflexes if you're to survive. Defeat a barrage of foes, collect power-ups and choose from a variety of enhancements. *Gradius* proved so popular that Konami even released a parody entitled *Parodius*, where the aliens and space environments were replaced with pastel colours and cats.



Nothing beats the thrill of a classic 2D shooter. The genre is still extremely popular today.



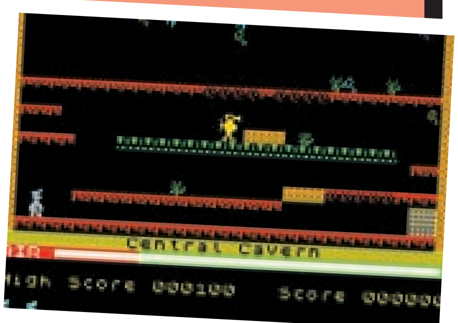
The dream game of many a collector, Sega's seminal RPG still more than holds its own today.

30 Panzer Dragoon Saga

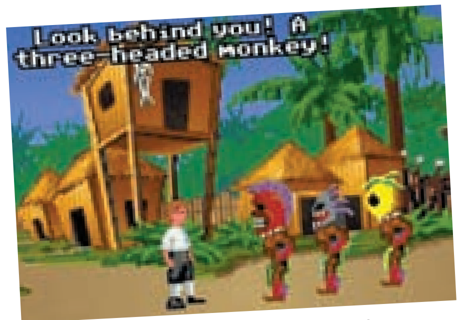
A true triumph from Saturn, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* filled the RPG-based-around-dragons hole that we never even knew existed in our lives. This cinematic adventure – the third and final part in the trilogy – is notable for the decent voice acting and impressive FMV sequences. It's also notable for its incredible size – *Panzer Dragoon Saga* spanned a quartet of wonderful game discs. The deep and enthralling story revolves around Edge – a young gun for hire, as well as a mysterious and beautiful girl with many, many secrets. Undoubtedly one of the greatest non-Hedgehog moments in Sega's history, we can often still find ourselves immersed in *Panzer Dragoon Saga*'s hypnotic world today – and rightly so.

29 Manic Miner

With the simplest of control methods and the slightest of stories, *Manic Miner* thrilled a generation of gamers and remains one of the platform genre's finest moments. Our hero Willy has stumbled down a mineshaft and discovered a new civilisation. This means running and jumping around a huge number of rooms avoiding all kinds of bizarre foes, collecting cash and opening the portal to the next challenging cavern. The thing with *Manic Miner* is that when you fail, you KNOW it's your fault.



The most annoying game of all time. And one of the best.



More *Monkey Island* magic. The original, and the best.

28 The Secret Of Monkey Island

We're not surprised that this slice of the hilarious series has leapt above its followers in the chart because it was the original chapter that really stood out as proof that LucasArts was onto something big. While passing the trials necessary to become a top pirate, Threepwood falls for Elaine, but just when things seem to be going his way she's kidnapped by the ghostly pirate LeChuck and a gaming legend is born… albeit one who's weapon of choice is a rubber chicken with a pulley in the middle.

27 R-Type

The king of scrolling shoot-'em-ups, *R-Type*, sees increasingly tricky aliens attacking you from all angles. Your ship may be small, but by holding down the fire button, your shot becomes all-powerful and can slice through enemies like a hot knife through butter. The most memorable part of *R-Type* is the strange and grotesque bosses. They may not equal the pus-filled mutants of the *Contra* series for horror, but they are some of the hardest we've encountered.

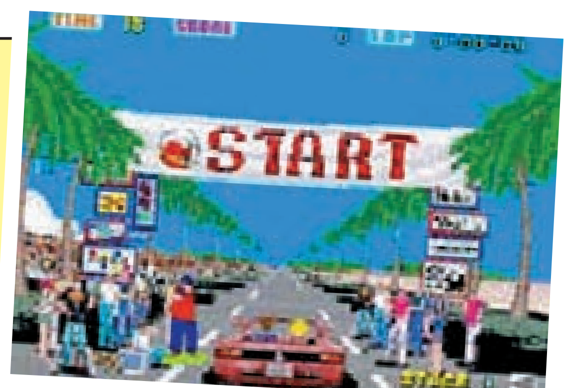


Nothing beats a bit of *R-Type*. Still one of the most perfectly balanced videogames ever made.

26 OutRun

Accelerate. Steer. Dodge. DON'T CRASH. Oh, how we do love a good game of *OutRun*. Never has a racing game managed to feel so American and so darned cute as you cruise down the highway with a hot babe in the passenger seat and the wind in your hair. *OutRun* is set up so that you can afford maybe one crash, but anything more than that and you'll be crying as you watch the timer hit zero while you're mere centimetres from the finish line. It's the ultimate 'just one more go' challenge. Add to this multiple routes, colourful graphics and a great soundtrack (Magical Sound Shower, anyone?) and you'll have your very own great Sega treat.



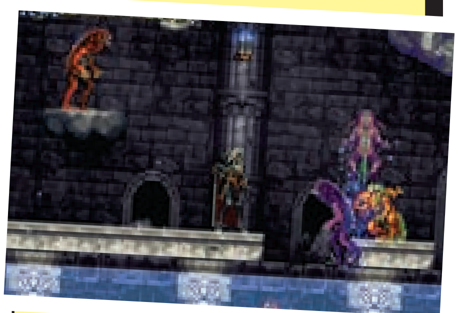


OutRun is so seminal it's been reincarnated many times on many formats.

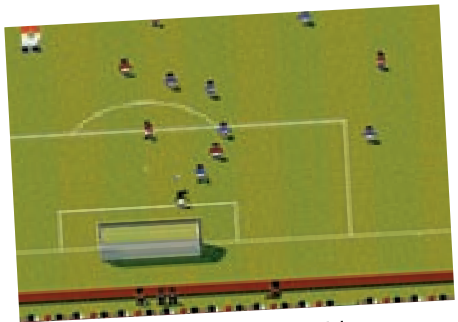
Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night

25

The most revered of Konami's *Dracula* epics, *Symphony Of The Night* saw the series make its transition to Sony's wonder-console; with this came quality cinematic scenes and a very atmospheric experience. All that made it a smash on the NES was improved and *SOTN* had the value of a Hollywood movie not just a gaming sequel.



The Belmonts really hate vampires. Nobody hates vampires as much as the Belmonts



Still many people's football game of choice. If only *PES* had its management options.

Sensible World Of Soccer

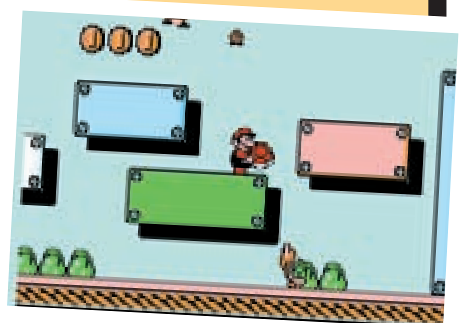
24

You'd think it would be impossible to improve upon the classic football brilliance of Sensible Soccer, but this updated version somehow did just that. The action remains the same but *Sensible World Of Soccer* adds improved graphics and updated teams. There are also more weather conditions to opt for, greatly changing how players react to the action.

Super Mario Bros. 3

23

After the not-a-proper-sequel-but-still-a-massive-hit thrills of *SMB2*, some fans might have thought that the bubble was ready to burst, but it didn't. It was Hollywood movie/advert The Wizard that first showed fans the beauty of *Super Mario Bros. 3*, and no fan of the plumber left that movie without instantly running to the shops to put a deposit down on what was to become possibly the greatest NES game of them all.



The first time we ran behind that block, we nearly cried. We were very young.



The game that started it all. The most influential FPS ever.

Half-Life

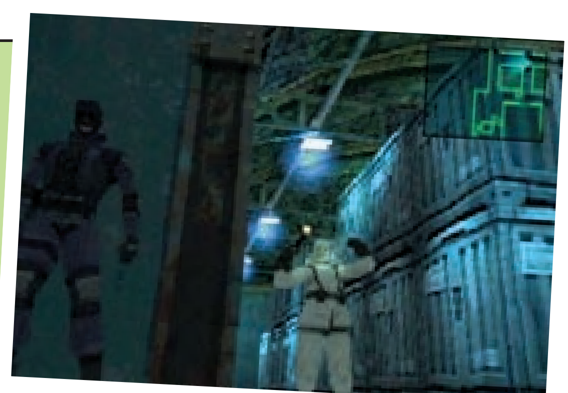
22

It's actually very tricky to conceive that the world of PC online gaming ever existed at all before *Half-Life*, such is the success and influence of Valve's mega-hit. What put *Half-Life* above all the other games in the genre was the fact that it featured an exciting and challenging single-player mode as well as the usual multi-player shenanigans. The story of scientist Gordon Freeman and his fight against monstrous creatures caught the imaginations of all gamers and soon it was not only sweeping up Game Of The Year awards left, right and centre, but fans were modding the game and adding their favourite characters to the mix as well. Valve released its own follow-up product, and you know the rest…

Metal Gear Solid

21

Solid Snake may not have originated on the PSOne but it was this machine that showed exactly what espionage titles were capable of with the iconic thrills of *MGS*. A truly adult adventure, the game managed to reproduce *Bond*-style thrills better than any *007* game to date. The cinematics pushed the PlayStation to its limit, and the sneaking stealth play revolutionised the genre. While PS2 versions may have had too much story and rambling cut-scenes, the original is all about the action and remains one of the machine's finest moments.



If it wasn't for Solid Snake, there would be far less stealth in this world.



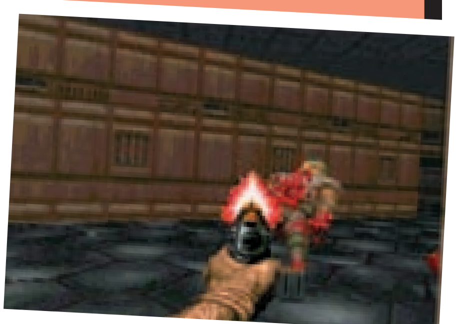
Red things with funny legs were all the rage in the Amiga days.

20 Turrican 2

The first *Turrican* game was an absolutely brilliant blaster and the sequel maintains that exact same brainless playability, only now our hero has even more firepower at his disposal. Armed as he is with a new power suit, *Turrican* is now capable to blasting in any direction – very handy, especially seeing as the enemies never let up while the action intensifies throughout the game. When he finds himself in a particularly sticky situation, *Turrican* can transform himself into a tiny gyroscope that can be used to lay mines, wiping out anything and everything that gets in the way. Variety is the name of the game. And the game is good. Very good.

19 Doom

While it may have caused more than a few sleepless nights for Jack Thompson, gamers have embraced the *Doom* series in all its guises – including the big screen version that hit the top spot in the US recently. It may have been *Wolfenstein* that shook things up, but id's follow-up *Doom* raised the bar with all its weapons. Enemies came thick and fast and who could forget the terrifying presence of those big red demonic blobs – this truly is the stuff of nightmares.



This is the least exciting *Doom* screenshot we could find for you.



There's nothing like kicking the living hell out of a big group of sprites.

18 Streets Of Rage 2

An instant classic, *Streets Of Rage 2* showed what Sega could do with its 16Mb cartridges. It was a huge graphical improvement over the original and the levels were also much larger. The duo of characters from the first game are joined by two new ones, and this time all the fighters have their own move-sets that vary greatly for each combatant. Of course, these new moves come in very handy, as there are also more enemies. If you tire of fighting evil, you can always fight each other with the new two-player Duel mode, an answer to the increasingly popular *Street Fighter* series.

17 Tetris

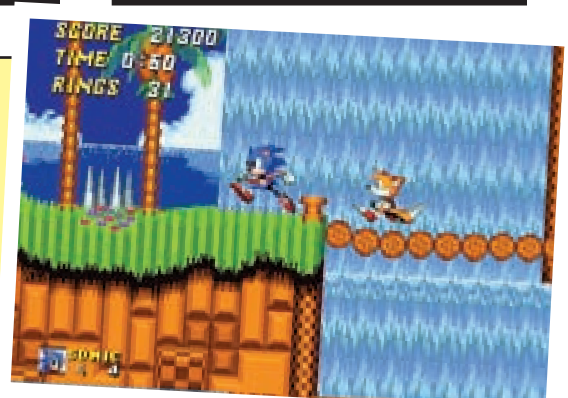
A simple but devilishly addictive puzzler. Tetris the Game Boy version will be the most widely revered, but it can also be seen as a major contributor to the success of the console. The greatest Russian export since vodka, the rotating block title is remembered for its ace soundtrack and its unbeatable gameplay – there are few who couldn't hum the classic theme and even fewer who have not gone to bed with images of bricks falling through their minds.



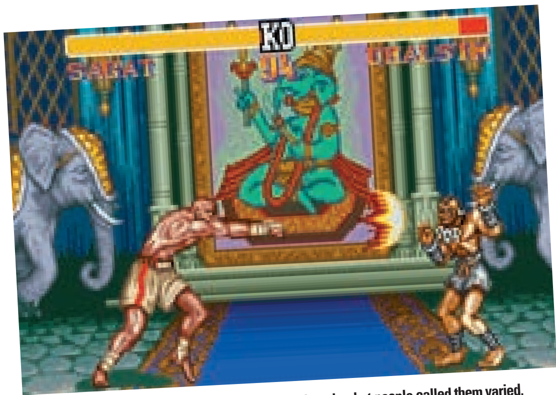
The most unanimously popular videogame ever? Quite possibly. No, definitely.

16 Sonic The Hedgehog 2

Sega's prickly blue mascot returns for his second dose of high-speed platforming nonsense, this time he's accompanied by a new hero, Miles 'Tails' Prower. (Geddit, miles per hour?) Gameplay is essentially the same as that of the original *Sonic* title – the story sees Dr Robotnik, once again trying to take over the world, this time by turning cute little animals into robots. Sonic the Hedgehog and Tails must restore peace by collecting all the chaos emeralds while also storing rings. Bigger than the first game, it also introduces a two-player option, where you can race against each other. One of the Mega Drive's greatest titles, Sonic's legend was firmly cemented here in *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*.



Tails is an annoying little cretin. Not as annoying as Charmy the Bee, though.



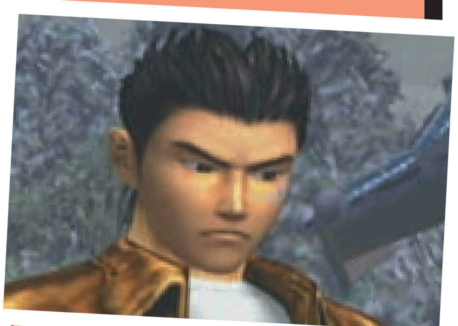
Playing as the bosses is just so satisfying. Though what people called them varied. Balrog? No, that's Bison. He's Vega. Whatever.

15 Street Fighter II Turbo

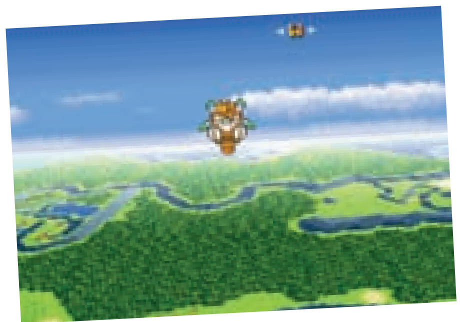
Occasionally when a company has a great deal of success with a videogame, sequels are rushed out almost immediately. But that was not the case when *Street Fighter II* hit it big. Oh no, instead, Capcom began tweaking the game and attempting to improve on perfection. *Street Fighter II Turbo* is the best of these upgrades, offering yet more characters to go with all the originals. As well as the new additions, the game now plays much faster than it ever did and there's also an all-new colour scheme throughout as well. Underneath all of this, the original intense gameplay remains and we've completely lost count of how many coins we wasted on this back in the arcade day. Of course, it wasn't actually wasted money.

14 Shenmue

One of the Dreamcast's finest hours, *Shenmue* is among only a few games that can best be described as 'art'. Taking on the role of Ryo, players are thrown into a world where you decide your own path and shape your own destiny. The environments are brought to life through beautiful visuals and a sweeping soundtrack. The player is granted a lot freedom; you can play the game at whatever pace you like. *Shenmue* is as close to a true interactive movie as games have yet come.



The only time we've ever looked for sailors. That's the honest truth.



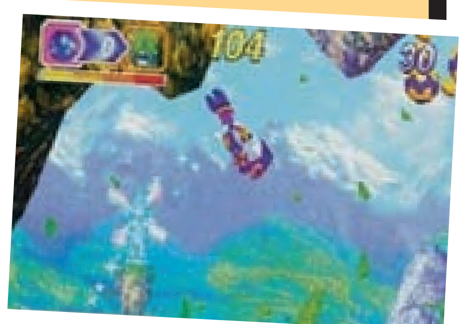
A beautiful and colourful secret that took a fair few game hours to reveal.

13 The Secret Of Mana

Youthful curiosity might be a magical thing, but not when it unleashes chaos around the world. This is what happens in *The Secret Of Mana* when our hero pulls the Mana sword from a stone – he must find eight Mana seeds to restore the seal that will return harmony to the world. Our hero sets off on his journey, an adventure filled with magic, adventure and real-time fighting. What separates *Secret Of Mana* from other RPGs was its use of vibrant colours, it also uses the SNES's Mode 7 technology to bring the world to life. The *Mana* series is second only to Zelda in the king of the RPG stakes.

12 NiGHTs Into Dreams

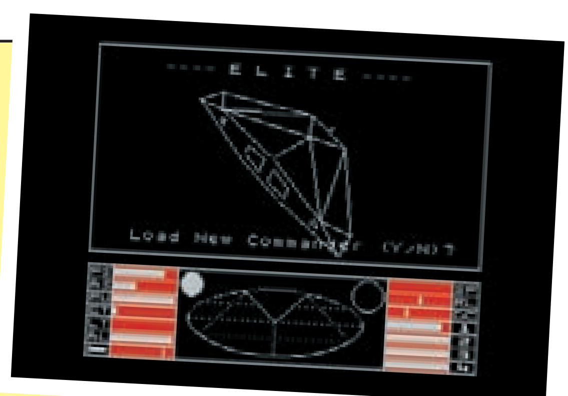
Describing the game is tricky as, being an amalgam of the racing and platform genres, *NiGHTs* doesn't really fit into any one category. It may be played out in a dreamworld, but it's still a classic tale of good versus evil as the brilliantly named Wizeman the Wicked attempts to break through into the real world. One of the most colourful and imaginative games ever, *NiGHTs* captures a dream world that you won't want to wake up from. Worth buying a Saturn for.



We wish we could fly, right up to the sky, but we can't. Unfortunately.

11 Elite

When Ian Bell and David Braben grew bored of *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man*, they decided to take the plunge and make their own game. Instead of merely focusing on score like most of the genre, their game would involve exploration, with rewards for trading and interaction, and so *Elite* was born. Soon, pretty much every BBC user had a copy of the game and the pair had a huge hit on their hands. Suddenly every computer user was a space pirate. Every copy of the game came with a postcard to send back to the company if you managed to reach Elite Status. The pair didn't expect anyone to play for this long, so when piles of them started to arrive, they knew they had something special and a software legend was born.



Never have white lines been so entertaining. Can you reach Elite status? We can.

Super Metroid

10

Isn't it always the way? You're on a routine space mission and you discover a powerful new life force, only to be ambushed by space pirates who nick the new creature and create a whole race of killing machines. Welcome to the world of *Super Metroid*… The adventures of Samus, whose mission is to eradicate the pirates and restore calm by destroying the creatures now known as Metroids, proved a big hit with gamers, and this Super Nintendo incarnation is widely regarded as one of the console's finest moments.



Why, whenever you lose a load of abilities is Kraid always in the way?



Forever blowing bubbles?
You can be sure of it with Bub and Bob on the case.

Bubble Bobble

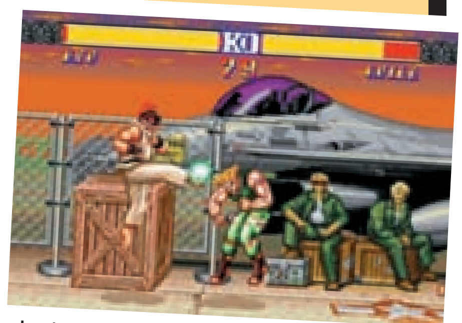
9

Taito's magical arcade adventure remains one of the most colourful and loved games ever as two dinosaurs Bub and Bob attempt to rescue their girlfriends by traversing 100 levels of bubble-bursting fun. In the arcade, *Bubble Bobble* was infamous thanks to the fact that the single player could not see the end until drafting in a second gamer. See, it even brings people together.

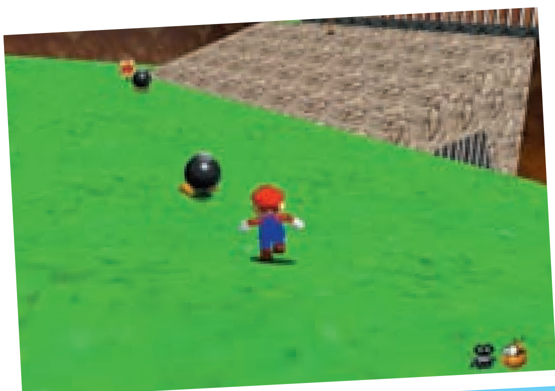
Street Fighter II

8

This sequel blew the lid off the genre and became the biggest and most iconic fighting title of all time. While the arcade version was a deserved smash, many experienced the game thanks to the brilliance of the Super Nintendo, thought to be the definitive edition. Capcom continued to enhance and tweak the game in numerous instalments, but this is still the Nintendo incarnation that you took to your hearts.



Learning to do a Hadoken for the first time ever, really hurts you're thumb.
Do you remember?



Finding Yoshi on the roof was a little disappointing, but on the whole *Mario 64* was tough to top.

Super Mario 64

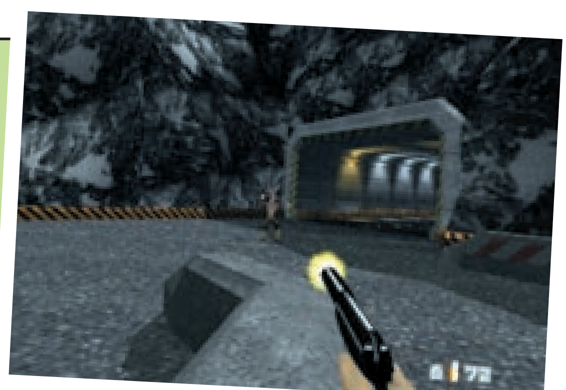
7

It's unbelievably difficult to put into actual words the experience of playing *Super Mario 64* for the first time – we imagine it was something akin to watching colour television after years of black and white. Here, finally, was the world of the illustrious plumber fully realised in three glorious dimensions with the freedom to go absolutely anywhere. The Nintendo 64 was born and we were loving it. The legacy of the game lives on, of course, with the Nintendo DS console also opting to use the game as a launch title where *Super Mario 64* proved to be just as playable and challenging as ever. It's still much better than *Sunshine*.

GoldenEye

6

A tie-in based on the latest *Bond* adventure? Normally this is a recipe for disaster, or at least a recipe for an average game. *GoldenEye* broke all the rules by being a smash hit with *Bond* fanatics and also offering unsurpassed gameplay for everyone else. The game followed the story of the movie closely and all the locations were faithfully reproduced. The one-player game was brilliant, but it's the multi-player that *GoldenEye* will be remembered for. Fans are still calling for a proper remake rather than the watered down Bond titles of today.



Select the Facility level and then hide in the toilets – we all know how it works.



Got a few hours to spare?
Plenty of us did and there were few better ways to spend them.

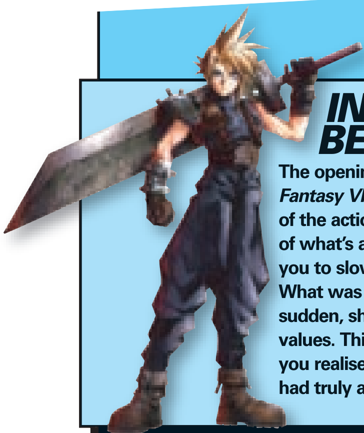
Final Fantasy VII

5

That *Final Fantasy VII* is one of the only games on this list to come with a spoiler warning speaks volumes about how strong its story was. Right? Wrong. Ask anyone to recall the game's story and only ardent fans will be able to untangle the messy tale of the Life Stream, Mako reactors and the Jenova project that birthed Sephiroth.

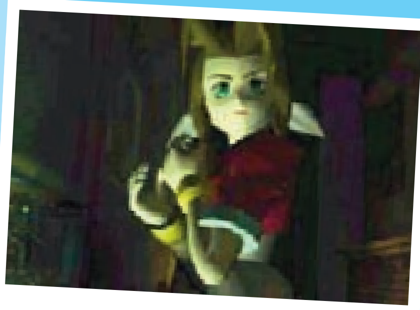
Instead – and now is the time to engage your spoiler alarms gentlemen – it was Aeris' death that has preserved *Final Fantasy VII*'s place in gaming's unspoken Hall of Fame. Having seen her relationship with Cloud gently blossom and your dependence on Aeris as the healer slowly increase, her sudden death was an unexpected jolt that broke RPG convention. If the various stories we've heard are to be believed, it's one of the few twists that actually made gamers cry.

Yet Aeris' death shouldn't detract from *Final Fantasy VII*'s main achievement elsewhere – namely, it was the first RPG to successfully bridge the gap from 16-bit to 32-bit and brought the niche genre kicking and screaming into the western mainstream. The production values hadn't been matched by anything else at the time and, along with the brilliant way you could create Materia combinations, its popularity quickly soared. The purists argue that Locke's story in *Final Fantasy VI* was more engaging, while series latecomers have often sided with Squall and Rinoa's protracted love story in *Final Fantasy VIII*. It doesn't matter. *Final Fantasy VII* provided RPGs with a much-needed jolt in the arm and gave us one of gaming's all-time iconic images. Job done.



IN THE BEGINNING

The opening moments of *Final Fantasy VII* throw you into the heart of the action with little explanation of what's actually going on, leaving you to slowly piece the plot together. What was more obvious was the sudden, shocking jump in production values. This was the moment that you realised next-generation gaming had truly arrived.



Zelda: Link To The Past

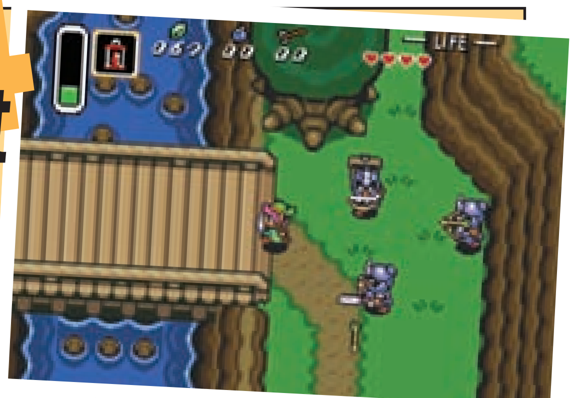
4

We're not at all surprised that Link's most memorable adventure (at least in our eyes) appears so high in this countdown – at least one member of the team cites it as the defining game of their childhood, with others nodding their approval. Certainly, the SNES helped take our Hyrulian hero to new heights by taking what had already proved a huge success (the original *Zelda* formula, as opposed to the side-scrolling approach of the sequel) and making it… well, more.

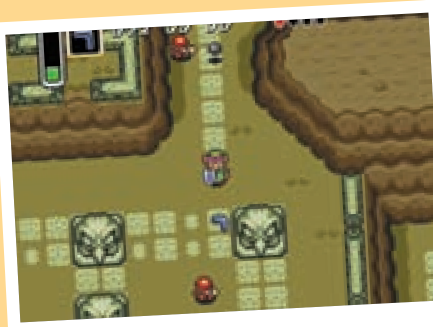
For starters, there's a proper story – complete with side-quests and table-turning twists, and whereas before you were never given any true indication of where to go or what to do, *Link To The Past* hangs together better in terms of sheer logical progression.

Of course, it's so beautifully vibrant, packed into a world full of character and life, and the fact that it takes advantage of the SNES's abilities makes a big difference too. From zooming around the map in Mode 7 to the incredibly elaborate (for the time) bosses, not to mention the way the game teases areas that you can't reach before rewarding you with new and interesting items that allow you to progress – the game is a delight to behold.

Indeed, we still afford ourselves the pleasure of saving Princess Zelda in her SNES form to this day, despite the fact that we appear to be mastering the art of finishing it in record time. Long gone are the days when we had to hunt high and low for those last few Pieces of Heart.

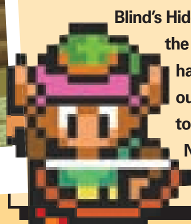


We never did find out why that fairy near the end was so fat. It concerns us greatly every day.



GOING UNDERGROUND

There are just so many to choose from, but if pressed we'd have to plump for the fourth dungeon in the Dark World: Blind's Hideout. You spend all your time down in the dungeon attempting to rescue a totally harmless little girl… and then she turns out to be the evil thief boss Blind, and tries to kill you? Not so harmless any more eh? Now where's the justice in that? We asks you.



Super Mario World

3



The introduction of Yoshi, the Koopa Kids and Bowser in a big clown head… Could it have been any better?

As a launch game for the SNES, Nintendo really couldn't have done much better than *Super Mario World.* And that's not just because it heralded the return of Mario, who had taken on the role of being 'the face of videogames' at the time with great pleasure – indeed, we'd be more inclined to point out how the game was easy to get into, challenging enough to test players to their limits and had enough levels, bosses and secrets to keep you playing for a long, long time. Nintendo's genius was already well catalogued… but it took *Super Mario World* to prove it to a wider audience.

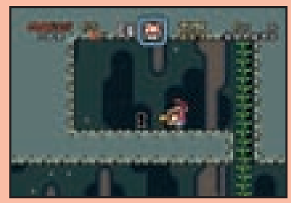
Of course, the actual action of the game isn't exactly original, especially given the previous success of *Super Mario Bros. 3* on the NES – platform jumping, enemy stomping and Bowser beating are all very much the order of the day, although we're hardly going to complain about that.

However, *Super Mario World* manages to combine some more detailed landscapes and interesting new faces (including the first ever appearance from Nintendo regular Yoshi – which means 'happy' in Japanese) with the capable effects of the SNES to create an even more absorbing game. And naturally, it's a massive mountain to climb too; finishing the game might not take that long (although it's certainly long enough) but finding all 96 'exits' and seeing everything is incredibly hard. Still, the challenge is certainly worth the effort. Just don't mention the word Tubular to us, or we're liable to run away screaming.



THAT'S SPECIAL

Does a bit where you don't even have to do anything count as a standout moment? We think so, especially as it also involves listening to some kick-ass music. Unlock the Special World through the already secret Star Road and then sit back for some retro samba stylings – it doesn't get much better than that, now does it?



The Legend Of Zelda: The Ocarina Of Time

2



The time travel sequence is still glorious to behold. *Ocarina Of Time* is as brilliant today as ever it was.

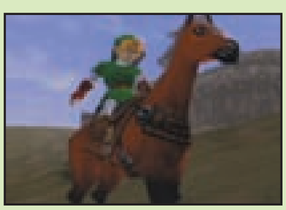
Sure, Aiji Aonuma's little green creation has been featured a fair few times in this countdown, but we really have saved the best until last. *Ocarina Of Time* was an adventure of such scale that no one can deny the sheer involvement of the experience. There have been few games more absorbing, with events that occurred throughout the game rating highly in many people's fondest gaming memories. Whether it's the sadness felt when you realised you would have to grow up without Saria, the panic that the battle with the giant Dodongo conjured, or the annoyance of the kid in the graveyard that refused to take the Skull Mask off you when you were so sure that he wanted it, we were all touched by the game in one way or another.

In fact, while we're on the subject of annoyance, *Ocarina Of Time* also featured what's considered one of the most irritating temples of all time – namely, the Water Temple. Changing the depth of the water led to untold hours being lost, and was almost as frustrating as watching those camp carpenters run around while trying to catch Cuccos in the Kakariko Village.

This aside, there was nothing but wonder on offer and, of course, nothing could prepare you for the game's end where Gannon finally revealed his true minotaur form after faking death. In fact, we're going off to have a play now, there are bound to be a few Skulltulas we haven't managed to find yet.

HORSE PLAY

There are many moments throughout *Ocarina Of Time* that deserve a mention, but our favourite just has to be when you finally get on the back of the adult Epona and escape Lon Lon Ranch in style by leaping over the rear fence. The image of Epona rearing up in front of the setting sun will forever be with us.





Super Mario Kart



And so we arrive at the ultimate entry in our monumental countdown – and it's a choice that might come as a little bit of a surprise. Given the fact that this series is still going today, though, and that the DS version has sold almost a million copies in this territory at the time of writing, it's perhaps not so astonishing that *Super Mario Kart* should take the top spot.

With this deceptively simple little racer, Nintendo invented the character-based racing game genre that it still continues to dominate. By pitting its entire catalogue of characters against each other on the racetrack, Nintendo created a series that has survived for more than ten years and, incredibly, still proves itself both exceptionally popular and as fun as it ever was back in 1992.

Memories of tearing around this classic SNES game's pancake-flat tracks, holding back red shells until the final lap before finally zipping past opponents right at the finish line still have us grinning in triumph. With the introduction of items to the racing genre, Nintendo took the emphasis off sheer racing skill (although it played a tremendously important role) and put it squarely back on having fun. Multi-player especially. *Mario Kart* ranks among the best games ever made and few come close to emulating the sheer elation of winning a hard-fought, neck and neck race around Mario Circuit 1 by only the slightest of margins.

Perhaps the best thing about *Super Mario Kart*, especially in relation to the subsequent games, is its sheer difficulty. It wasn't until we nonchalantly decided to work through to Rainbow Road to get screenshots for this feature that we remembered how excruciatingly, fist-eatingly difficult the 150cc cup challenges really were – winning the Special Cup is a feat of sheer will and determination due to the monstrously good luck of the AI opponents. And yet that's part of what makes *Super Mario Kart* so great – the fact that a single red shell or well-timed lightening strike can turn a race completely upside down and have you screaming at the screen (or at a mate) in triumph, humiliation or disbelief.

Super Mario Kart was a landmark game for Nintendo, for the SNES and for videogaming itself, and in the eyes of much of the retro community it has never been equalled by any subsequent effort. The sublime courses remain the epitome of 2D track design and the game's infuriating and addictive fusion of skill and luck remains entirely addictive. Making it to **games**™'s readers' number one is a further accolade to add to its extensive collection of praise.



Never has timing been as important as it was at the beginning of each *Mario Kart* race. It honed our reflexes for life.

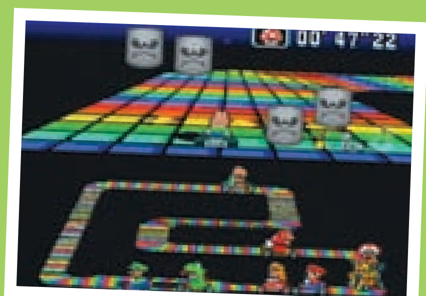
SHORT CUT

Another of *Super Mario Kart's* best-remembered features was its multitude of jammy short cuts. With the aid of a feather or a mushroom, the game could be exploited to such a degree that 'fastest time' tables in magazines around the world deteriorated into farce with players exploiting bugs to get sub-five-second lap times. Done properly, though, there was nothing more satisfying than the perfectly executed *Super Mario Kart* short cut – landing on that thin beam in Ghost Valley 1 in order to take first on the last lap is a matter of sublime skill, make no mistake about that.







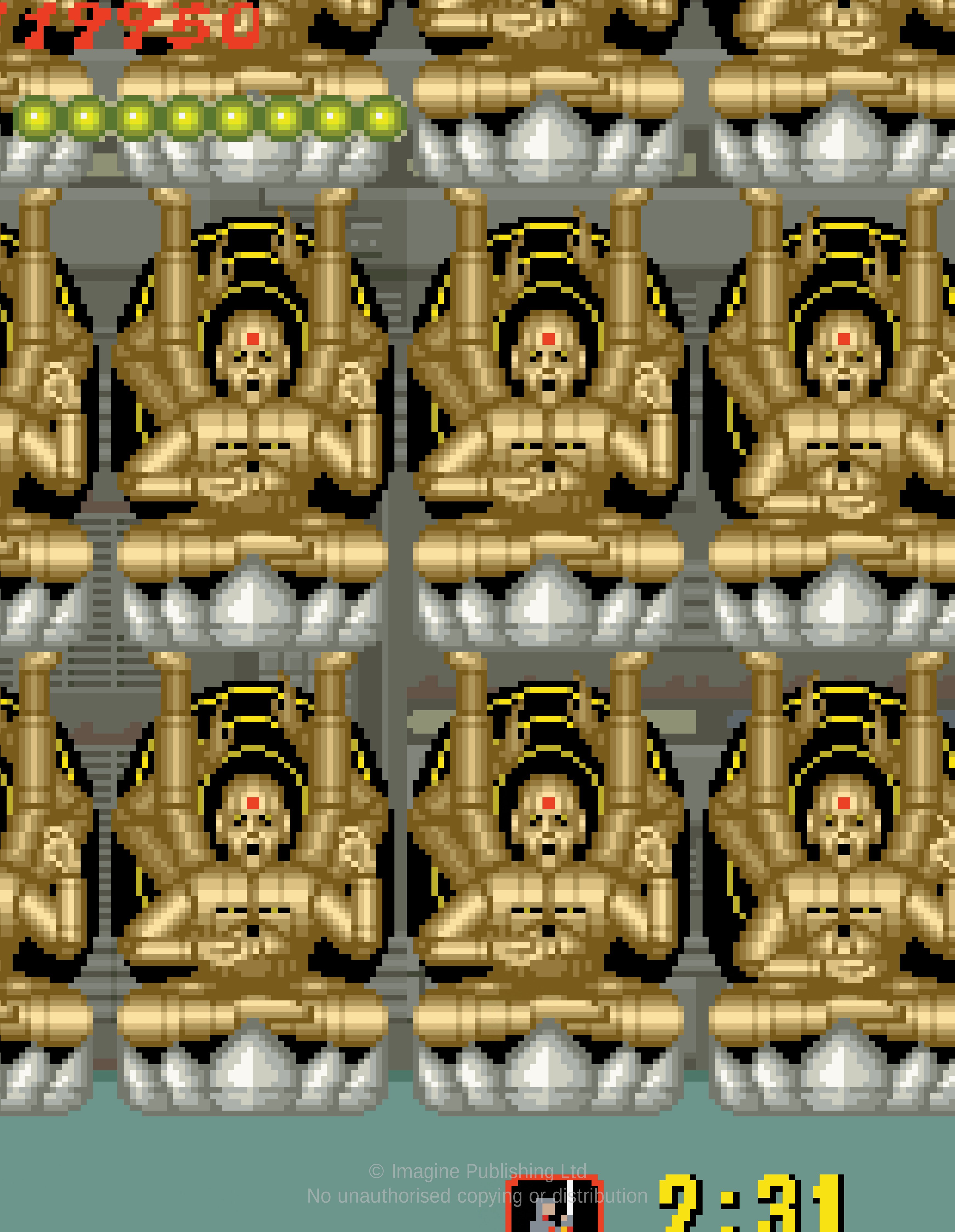


DEFINING MOMENT

Rainbow Road! It's just brilliant. Much sweat, many tears and many broken controllers after your very first go, you finally hit Rainbow Road at the end of the illustrious Special Cup – a course that was exceptionally long, exceptionally twisty and exceptionally harsh. None of its subsequent iterations have come anywhere near to equalling the difficulty of this original Rainbow Road and it's as satisfying to race now as it was all those years ago.



So many idols, so little time… **Shinobi – Arcade [Sega] 1987**


79950
2:31

FALCOM'S MAGI
FANTASY ADVENT



CAL TURE

Retro Feature



▲ Mail and Slick share an intimate moment up in the trees. Nothing wrong with that.

YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF POPFUL MAIL? YOU'RE MISSING A TREAT. AND THIS IS WHY...

Story: John Szczepaniak

Importing videogames is seen by some as elitist and unnecessary, but sometimes it's the only way to acquire games of genuine quality. The slightly obscure *Popful Mail* series is a perfect example of why everyone should be encouraged to consider foreign games, since the series never made it to Europe.

The *Popful Mail* titles were created by the celebrated Japanese RPG developer Falcom – the same inspired minds that brought the world the *Ys* and *Faxanadu* games, meaning *Popful Mail* certainly has a good pedigree. While it may have at first seemed destined to remain in Japan forever it was eventually localised for the American Sega CD thanks to Working Designs, which is arguably the saviour of Western games players (it was also responsible for translating and bringing over the *Lunar* series of games as well as *Dragon Force*, *Magic Knight Rayearth* and many other Saturn classics).

There are six different *Popful Mail* games in existence (possibly more if you consider the US translation and alleged Korean IBM version), and they can be divided into three distinct categories: NEC, Nintendo and Sega.

While each of the companies' systems was graced by unique and vastly different versions of the games, all contain the same basic principles and core elements that make them such a joy to play individually.

In gameplay terms all of them can be loosely described as being similar to Sega's *Wonderboy: The Dragon's Trap*, albeit greatly improved. There's a tremendous sense of satisfaction to be had from traversing the many platforms and slashing at enemies while solving various puzzles. Here Falcom must be commended since, as in most of its side-scrolling 2D games, the level design has been honed to perfection with everything feeling perfectly balanced.

While the need to switch between the three main characters (each with their own life bars, weapons, special traits and even bosses) allows for some well implemented obstacles and themed stages, it's a great example of just how well a 2D design ethos can work. Each game also had a sublimely cheerful soundtrack, as well as its own set of anime-styled cut-scenes that greatly enhanced the atmosphere, and often there are different scenes depending on which characters are talking to NPCs.

The story defied convention in that unlike other RPGs of the time, no-one actually needed saving. Instead it simply focused on the lead bounty hunter's quest for riches, which inadvertently leads to adventure. In the case of the American Sega CD version, it also stands as one of the funniest and most well-executed translations of the era.

All of this begs the question: why on earth were these games, bar one, never released outside Japan?

A LEGEND IS BORN

The first game in the series was released in 1991 for the Japanese NEC PC-88 (a high-end Japanese computer), and it was the basic foundation for all that would follow. A year later the game was updated and released for the NEC PC-98 (another computer) with enhanced graphics and totally revamped cut-scenes, although gameplay was identical.

The biggest difference between these and later games was that attacking enemies was automatic – the characters only needed to run into the side of an enemy to damage and eventually kill it, with the attack button remaining unused until projectile weapons were acquired. This greatly lowered the difficulty, since many bosses only needed repeated touching to be defeated.

Special note should be made about the visuals, since despite being very small there was a great deal of personality crammed into all the sprites (making great use of the limited palette). Falcom also painstakingly drew the left- and right-facing images accurately for both the main characters and enemies, meaning no-one would appear 'ambidextrous'. Interestingly, these early games bore more than a slight resemblance to Falcom's other series – *Dragon Slayer*/*Legacy Of The Wizard*. Overall these were some great games for the Japanese computers, coming in what are arguably the nicest floppy disc box sets around and being compelling enough for everyone to enjoy.

FAMICOM FAME

It would be another two years before any further games were

THE MANY COVERS OF POPFUL MAIL OVER THE YEARS



ぽっぷるメイル

released, with a distinctive non-sequential trio being spread over the NEC PC-Engine Super CD (Turbo-Duo), Nintendo Super Famicom and Sega Mega CD.

The PC-E CD version was basically just an enhanced port of the PC-98 game, with a larger colour palette, redone cut-scenes (again) and voice acting added for more important sections of dialogue; though bizarrely, it lost the left and right sprite images from the previous games. It also benefited from more accurate pad control and an improved automatic downward attack, which makes it very reminiscent of *Mario* games, since enemies could be killed simply by jumping on their heads.

Otherwise the battle system remained unchanged, making the NEC system version the most unusual to play with regards to control. Later on it also featured exclusive new levels designed for each character, essentially making it the best of the various NEC games.

The Super Famicom game, also released in 1994, marked the most dramatic transformation for the series. While all the main characters and stage themes remained the same, the actual style, narrative, puzzles and level designs had been changed completely, while a manual up and down attack was implemented.

It also brought about an innovative money system, since instead of collecting treasure bags from downed foes the enemy was marked down on a 'bounty hunting card'. The points scored on this could then be redeemed for gold at certain bounty shops, some of which also sold general items. This had little tangible effect on the gameplay, but did lend itself well to the bounty hunter storyline. Despite seeming like a total re-interpretation of the *Popful Mail* universe the core gameplay remained the same, making it a good alternative for those who have completed the other games, yet still demand more.

CD CHANGES

The Sega CD version, released in Japan in 1994 (and a year later in America) with another graphics overhaul and redone cut-scenes, is not only regarded as the pinnacle of the series but should also be of major interest to *Sonic* fans, since it very nearly became a *Sonic The Hedgehog* spin-off (no pun intended) tentatively labelled *Sister Sonic*. Apparently, while Sega was porting the game on behalf of Falcom, it toyed with the idea of transforming it into a *Sonic* title in order to boost sales of the then floundering Sega CD system. It was going to feature Sonic searching for his sister who had been lost at a toy fair, with all the *Popful Mail* characters replaced by Sega's more well-known mascots.

There is, of course, nothing new about this practice – the histories of the *Wonderboy* and *Mario* franchises are littered with equally strange character replacements. Yet while the idea of another *Sonic* game may seem appealing, the gameplay mechanics of *Popful Mail* are completely unsuited to the franchise; it probably wouldn't have worked and may have angered fans on both sides of the Atlantic. So it's just as well then that *Popful Mail* fans, upon discovering what Sega was planning to do, flooded the company with enough furious letters and petitions to force it to rethink. As such, the game was released unchanged.

Popful Mail on the Sega CD rightly deserves its critical acclaim earned abroad, since it's arguably the finest game to grace the system alongside *Snatcher*, *Sonic CD* and *Shining Force*. The machine's limited palette was expertly used to create some luscious visuals, while gameplay was smoother and more fluid than ever. The difficulty was also greatly increased – Sega had taken some of the basic level structure from the earlier NEC version and overlaid it with a vastly improved control and combat system. It also removed some of the backtracking from previous versions, such as the lengthy searching needed to free a character trapped in the caves.

While at first glance the Sega CD version may appear to be the same as the NEC versions, Sega really made it its own with gameplay distinctive enough to warrant playing both versions. It also added improved and lengthy cut-scenes between each level that helped flesh out the story and it was a great example of what to do with the new CD medium.

Strangely, the character sprites were again mirrored and made 'ambidextrous', as opposed to the separately drawn left/right sides in the original PC-88/98 versions; this was unusual given the massive capacity of CD-ROMs, which could have easily held the extra images. While it may seem pedantic to dwell on such things, this does show a lack of extra effort being put into the game during development and hampers the player's sense of immersion. It's small touches in

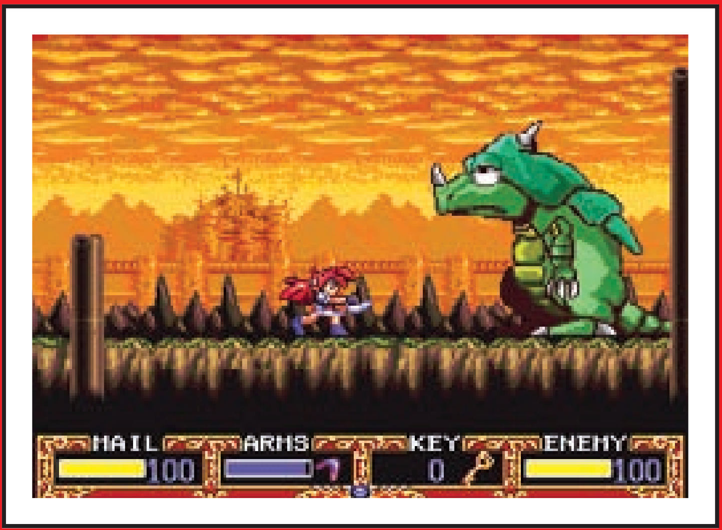
POPFUL GOODIES

Like all good anime-themed games, *Popful Mail* has its own range of merchandise. For the dedicated collector there is an ultra-rare Collected Manga Volume written by Yu Aizaki, around seven radio drama CDs (Japanese language only, sadly) with Megumi Hayashibara as Mail, and, of course, the standard abundance of strategy guides, music compilations, calendars, posters, trading cards, toys and so on. Unfortunately, as always, these were mainly released in Japan.



▲ Big eyes, big hair, big swords, small costumes… is it manga? We think it might be…

> "BEG, BORROW OR 'ACQUIRE' A COPY – JUST MAKE SURE YOU PLAY A POPFUL MAIL GAME"



▲ The Sega CD was pushed to the limits with some stunning vistas, showing what CD-ROMs could do.



▲ You'll need to have a chat with this old man in order to pass the cave section in the Super Famicom version.

videogames that make them stay in the hearts of gamers over time, especially on such antiquated hardware. This is what gave the PC-88/98 games that extra bit of polish.

Then again, it's the extra effort and small touches put into the US localisation by Working Designs that help make the translated Sega CD game so special in the first place. According to Working Designs there are 39 individual speaking parts in the game (though some are simple one-liners) and it took roughly four months to record – twice as long as any other project it had done. Sometimes the team worked 12 to 16 hours a day on two different shifts, just for around 20 minutes of cut-scenes and two and a half hours of in-game dialogue. The team admit to being perfectionists, with some lines supposedly requiring anywhere between 20 and 50 takes before they were happy with it. This level of dedication really shines through, with the voice acting being incredibly good and at times absolutely hilarious – another high point for the game.

While the Japanese script could charitably be described as 'dull', Working Designs went to great lengths during translation to inject it with humour, resulting in a script that is genuinely funny and works perfectly with the light-hearted style of the game. There are plenty of well-executed jokes, ranging from several Schwarzenegger film references to hilarious 'cake and pie' gags for one character. While some fans have complained about Working Designs' methods, accusing it of not staying true to the source material, the sterling work it did on *Popful Mail* shows a real love for the game and benefited it far more than a simple straight translation ever would have.

HOW TO PLAY

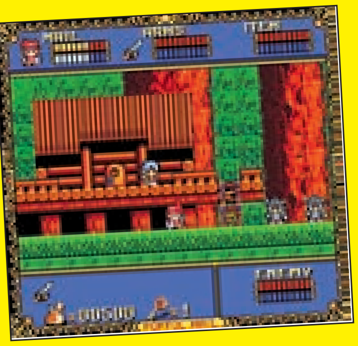
As has been said, the only way to legally play these phenomenal games is through importing. While the PC-88/98 games can be emulated (the PC-98 game is best, looking better and being far easier to set up) the classier version is the Turbo-Duo game, which runs without the need for an expensive arcade card on any region of system.

The Super Famicom game will need either a native system or import adapter. But be warned: there are a few sticking points. To pass the cave section, for instance, head back to the first town and find the mini-game-playing old man. For the Sega CD it's trickier, since though there is a CDX adapter cartridge, it only works on earlier models of system. Luckily, the game can easily be patched using ConvSCD (www.retrodev.com), which is well worth investigating for all your Sega CD importing needs. Failing that, the CD games can be run via an emulator.

When you look at it, this is one series that has been criminally overlooked (as have most Falcom games, for that matter), and really should have been granted a UK release. Whether you must beg, borrow or 'acquire' a copy, be sure to play one by any means necessary, especially the superb Sega version.

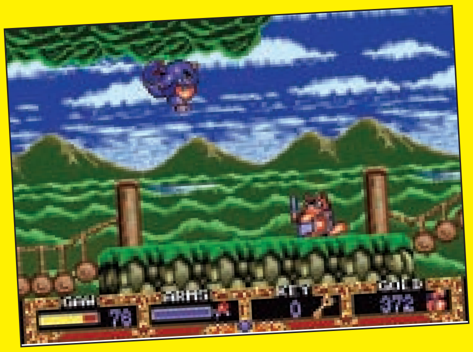
As for the future? There is hope, since Falcom has recently given Japanese gamers another handheld game worth caring about by announcing a port of the earlier iterations to mobile phones. Though, as expected, they won't be leaving Japan any time soon. What we really need is a PS2 or even PSP port, which could be quite likely since Working Designs still owns the rights to its translated text and dialogue (find out more in our interview over the page), though it would need to re-licence the game itself. Maybe some written requests might be the order of the day…

SPECIAL THANKS TO BRADY HARTEL FOR SUPPLYING MANY RESOURCES.









Why Don't They Remake…

COMBAT SCHOOL

"TODAY YOU PEOPLE ARE NO LONGER MAGGOTS. TODAY YOU ARE MARINES"

Format: **Arcade**
Release: **1987**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-House**

It was easy to work out which of your mates used to play *Combat School* – you just had to look at the kids who had one arm that was significantly more developed than the other… Frantic mothers worried about all the grunting and squeaking that was emanating from their sons' bedrooms would hastily fling the door open, only to find that their loved ones were hunched over their Kempston joysticks and swearing frantically at their TV screens, and not taking part in other more risqué activities.

Originally released in arcades in 1987, Konami's *Combat School* proved a refreshing alternative to its *Track & Field* series and won an army of fans thanks to its diverse gameplay and swish visuals. Taking on the role of one of two soldiers your aim was simple – survive bootcamp. Arm wrestling, a stamina-sapping Iron Man contest and a tough obstacle course all tested your physical skills, while the progressively more difficult firing ranges honed your reflexes to perfection. Of course, the sheer intensity of *Combat School* meant that most people were lucky if they got through the obstacle course on their first attempt, let alone finish the actual game. Indeed, we lost count of the number of ten pences that we used to cram into Konami's gruelling title – we could have probably afforded to buy the actual machine…

The arcade version of the game used a trackball and you had to spin it like a man possessed if you want to make any sort of progression. Add a variety of obstacles of various heights that needed to be cleared and your arm would often feel like a dead weight by the time you were done. The precision required for the firing range, however, meant that you had to quickly regain control of your now useless limb, as even the stationary targets could be pretty tough to hit.

Despite the game's difficulty and the potential injuries it could cause (you could accidentally trap a bit of skin if you spun the trackball too hard) it was just so much fun to play. It was a great way of showing off your gaming prowess, as it took both skill and stamina to make it onto that all-important high-score board.

It was also treated to some superb home conversions (especially on the 8-bit systems) that required just as much skill and dedication. The Commodore 64 version in particular was absolutely fantastic and featured a rocking intro that really got the blood pumping. This awakening of adrenaline was needed as frantically rotating the joystick wasn't easy and would often require one person to take joystick duties, while a friend pressed the space bar to clear obstacles.



▲ Welcome to *Combat School*. Here you'll learn to change a tyre and eat a hot curry. Like a man.



▲ Old-school graphics – perfect for recreating the blockiness of breezeblocks.



▲ Doubts were raised over the qualifications of the cut-price Olympic hurdle manufacturers.



▲ Meet Nick and Joe: two rough, tough – yet slightly fey – roister-doisterers if ever we saw them.

Despite this minor setback, *Combat School* remained a favourite after-school challenge and bought out the competitiveness in even the meekest of individuals.

So that sets us nicely up for an update. Thanks to peripherals like dance mats, the EyeToy and various lightguns, a new version of *Combat School* could have serious potential. Imagine having to run on the spot like a lunatic and having the EyeToy capture your jumps in order to clear each course's obstacles. You could also flail your arms like a madman to simulate the boat-rowing sections in the Iron Man race, or maybe even sit down and pretend you're actually rowing – the possibilities are endless…

Then, of course, you have the firing ranges… There are plenty of different guns available for both the PS2 and Xbox, so you'd be spoilt for choice. Even the DS could get in on the action, as it should be easy to emulate a trackball on the second screen. Hell, the more we think about it, the more *Combat School* has to happen, and happen now. We'd better start working on those patents…

Great Retro Gaming Moment

IT'S TIME TO FORGET THAT BROTHERLY LOVE…

DOUBLE DRAGON

Format: Arcade
Release: 1986
Publisher: Technos/Taito
Developer: Technos Japan

You've got to love those Lee brothers. They might be a little dim (they leave their car in the garage and set off after the bad guys on foot) but they sure won't take any shit. But then, when your nearest and dearest (the lovely Marian) has just been punched in the gut and dragged off by some gun-toting bad guys you'd do the same… wouldn't you?

Seedy back alleys – complete with whip-wielding ladies of the night – and dangerous industrial areas were just a few of the locations that the brothers had to kick, punch and throw their way through, and then there's that dodgy bridge jump in the forest to worry about… Fortunately, the brothers had a decent variety of moves at their disposal and damn if they're weren't going to put each and every one of them to good use (although, in truth, a simple headbutt or elbow would get you through the entire game).

As they progressed through eerie forests and along precarious cliff tops their goal was finally in sight, but that, of course, presented its own little problem. Facing off against Big Boss Willy wasn't the most challenging aspect of the game (his gun's bullets were surprisingly easy to dodge) but Technos' next curveball definitely hit you for six.

Willy was defeated, Marian was still tied up, and yet the fight wasn't actually finished – one more opponent still stood in your way – your brother. What happened next was pure gaming gold; both players frantically beat the hell out of each other with whatever weapons were available, be it fist, foot or baseball bat.

The victor got the girl and a big smacker on the lips; the loser became just another casualty of the brothers' senseless rampage.

▼ Fight the evil-doers of the world, then fight your brother. It's almost, um, Shakespearean?





Rising Sun Retro

The advent of 16-bit consoles opened up a world of import gaming, and one incentive was the ability to get hold of games that would never appear outside Japan. With this in mind, we're taking a look at the import classics that never got released in the UK. This month it's the turn of Elevator Action Returns...

E•L•E•V•A•T•O•R A•C•T•I•O•N R•E•T•U•R•N•S

Release: 1997
Format: Saturn
Publisher: Taito
Developer: Ving

In 1983 Taito released the excellent *Elevator Action*, an arcade title that combined cute visuals and challenging gameplay to great effect. Considering its success, it seems strange that it took Taito 11 years to come up with a sequel and then a further three before it was ported to the Saturn. *Elevator Action Returns* was a stunning Saturn coin-up conversion that perfectly captured all the thrills of its arcade parent.

Unlike the original *Elevator Action*, which starred Agent 17, the sequel saw you choose from a selection of three spies: Jad the Taff, Edie Burret or Kart Bradfield. Whether you teamed up with a second player for gratuitous blasting, or preferred to go it alone, the aim was the same – work your way down to the bottom of a building and diffuse all the bombs along the way.

Red doors marked the location of each bomb, while data, points and food were hidden behind blue doors. Entering a room would see you leave the screen for a few moments in order to diffuse the bomb inside; this was also a handy way to avoid the bullets fired by the terrorists who occupied each apartment block.

While the on-screen characters were a little on the small size, they were all perfectly animated. Shoot an enemy in the chest and he'd slump to the ground leaving a bloodstain on the wall behind him, fire a rocket launcher at him and he'd run around engulfed in flames. This animation was enhanced by the amount of destruction in the game: lights could be shot out, elevators would crush unwary characters and enemies, and careful bomb-throwing could trigger explosions that blanketed entire floors.

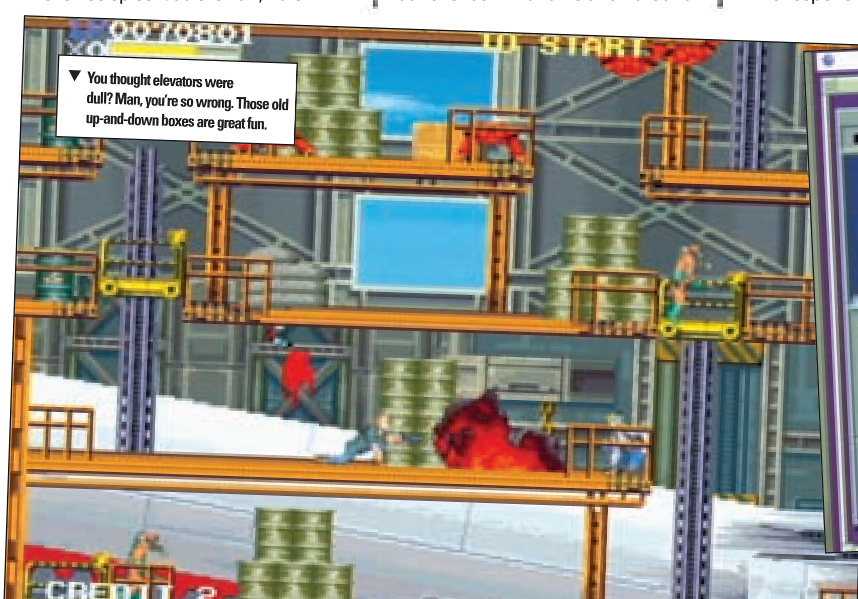
The action was accompanied by some suitably meaty spot effects and a great selection of jazz-style tunes that, bizarrely, fitted the carnage perfectly. Although it was far from an aesthetic masterpiece, *Elevator Action Returns* is a perfectly accomplished conversion and still holds up well today.

But perhaps the most enjoyable aspect of *Elevator Action Returns* was the gameplay. Controls were incredibly slick, and while the game was tough it was never unfair. The responsive controls meant you only had yourself to blame whenever a life was lost, and though the gameplay was simple it never became repetitive. As you got deeper into the game the level structure became more complex; later stages were almost maze-like, and as more enemies filled the screen you had your work cut out trying to find the quickest and safest route to each bomb.

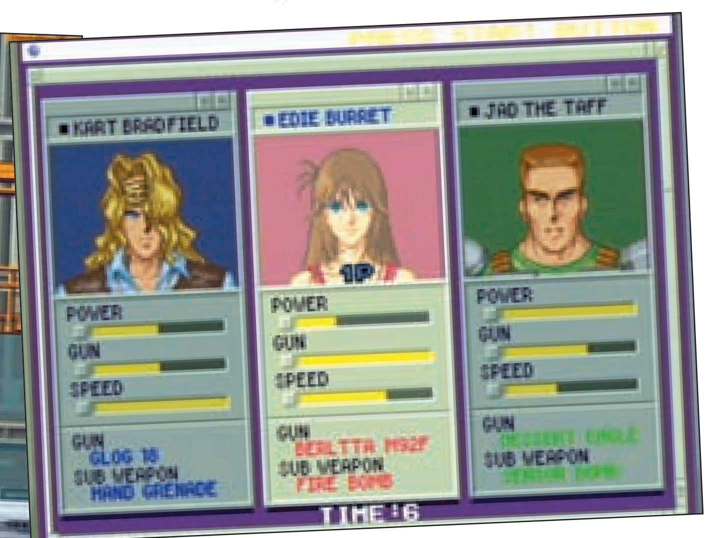
As much as we enjoy *Elevator Action Returns*, it isn't a game for everyone. There are few extras and unless you enjoy continually beating your high scores you may wonder what all the fuss is about. But if you're after something a little different you should find Taito's sequel a very rewarding experience.

OUT WITH THE NEW, IN WITH THE OLD

Once you've completed *Elevator Action Returns* (no mean feat as you only have a certain amount of credits) you'll unlock the original arcade game. Despite looking rather ropey by today's standards and lacking some of the elements of its sequel, *Elevator Action* is still enjoyable stuff. Let's just hope it makes it onto Empire's recently announced Taito compilation.



▼ You thought elevators were dull? Man, you're so wrong. Those old up-and-down boxes are great fun.



SUPER GHOULS 'N GHOSTS

WHO YOU CALLIN' CHICKEN?

Release: 1992
Format: SNES
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-House

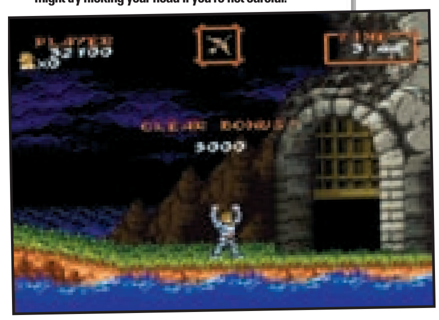
It wasn't an easy job being a knight. Not only did you live in a time when your genitalia was constantly shrivelled up due to being encased in metal, but you also had to face off against unruly peasants, tyrannical kings and giant, fire-breathing dragons. Sir Arthur fared even worse, however, as Capcom made him the hero of its *Ghost 'N Goblins* trilogy, and bloody tough they were too…

Take *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* for example. You started off in the sort of graveyard that would give the presenters of *Most Haunted* the willies, and as you fought your way past undead zombies, rabid dogs, flaming skulls and swollen pods it didn't get any better. Reaching a large clearing, the beleaguered knight came up against the biggest bird he'd ever seen. Appearing as a bizarre cross between a bird of prey and an over-sized chicken, your nemesis immediately closed in.

Lance (or whatever other weapon you picked up) at the ready, you gingerly back-pedalled in order to gauge the giant bird's first line of attack. Your feathered foe immediately coughed up a giant egg, which then proceeded to hatch into a ferocious mini eaglet. Easily dispensing your new adversary, your triumphant smile instantly evaporated when the powerful boss stretched his neck across the entire screen and gave you a nasty bite – instantly robbing you of your precious armour. Forced to run around in your heart-covered undies the remaining battle resulted in either you slaying the annoying beast or ending up as a polished pile of bones… either way though, it was a battle you'd never forget.



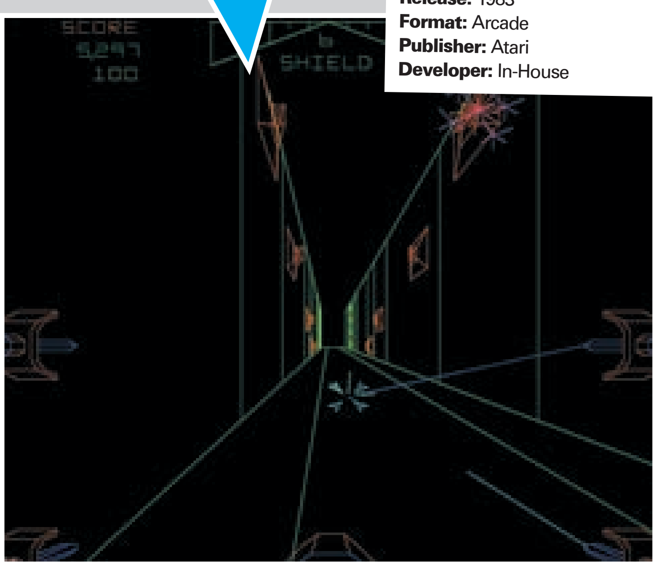
▲ Polly want a cracker? Probably not… although he might try nicking your head if you're not careful.



Great RETRO Gaming Moments

BLOW IT UP… THEN BLOW IT UP AGAIN

STAR WARS



Release: 1983
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Atari
Developer: In-House

Blowing up the Death Star has been a staple part of most *Star Wars* games for, ooh, we don't know… forever. And while enhanced graphics made the experience incredibly lifelike, we'd trade it all in an instant for Atari's original arcade game.

Despite being over 23 years old now, *Star Wars* remains a beautifully crafted game, further enhanced by its fantastic wireframe visuals and impressive smatterings of speech. But we're getting ahead of ourselves – back to blowing up Death Star…

After destroying countless waves of TIE Fighters, it was time to journey into one of the most famous trenches of all time. Hardcore gamers went straight to the Medium and Hard difficulty settings, meeting the Death Star's first line of defence – some bloody big towers. Those wanting less of a challenge, found themselves diving straight into the trench and one of the best moments in gaming.

Pulsing with excitement, your fingers became slick with sweat from all the shooting, and your breath came in short, ragged gasps.

"Yahoo! You're all clear kid. Now let's blow this thing and go home." With Solo's words still ringing in your ears, the next few moments were sheer instinct. The port was destroyed and you were moved a significant way from the Death Star to view your impressive handiwork. One spectacular explosion later and it was time to do it all over again…

Retro Interview



GEOFF CR

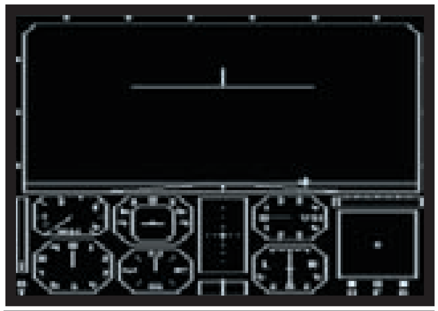
GEOFF CRAMMOND IS A LEGEND. AFTER WOWING BBC MICRO OWNERS WITH TITLES LIKE AVIATOR, HE MOVED ONTO THE C64, AMIGA AND ATARI ST. IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW, RETRO SHARED A FEW WORDS WITH THE GREAT MAN…



Geoff Crammond rarely does interviews. He isn't a recluse; he just likes to throw himself into his work and let the games speak for themselves. And they really do. He's been behind some of the most highly regarded titles of the last 25 years: *The Sentinel, Revs, Stunt Car Racer* and the *superb Grand Prix* series. Indeed, since *Aviator* appeared on the BBC Micro in 1983, he's been associated with the sim genre.

Although his games aren't exactly serious (see *Stunt Car Racer*) they all feature physics engines and a realism envied by other developers. You only need look at the *Grand Prix* series – easily the pinnacle of his career – to see how much energy he puts into each creation. It's a shame, then, that recent titles such as the much-anticipated *Stunt Car Racer Pro* have since fallen by the wayside. Still, a gap in his current work schedule gave Retro the chance to chat with 'Sir Geoff' about his illustrious career – an opportunity we didn't intend to waste.





▲ Aviator was incredibly advanced for its time and wowed gamers.







▲ Visually superior, but still just as playable as before – that's *Grand Prix 4*.

AMMOND

Retro: So, tell us how you came to be in the videogame industry?

GC: I bought one of the first BBC Micros. Months earlier I had an idea about writing some sort of flight simulator in 3D just for my own enjoyment. I wasn't actually thinking about a career in games. I played around with some BASIC programming which was easy enough to pick up because I already did FORTRAN programming at work. Frustratingly, I found the graphics too slow to do anything decent with and so, wanting to up the speed, I bought a book about 6502 assembler programming. I started experimenting with that and thought I would try writing a *Space Invaders*-type game in order to learn everything. It took me about three months and by the time I'd finished I thought it might be possible to sell copies on cassette by advertising it. At the same time I received an advertising brochure from Acornsoft, the software arm of Acorn computers, advertising other arcade-type games but nothing like mine. I rang them up and they were interested, so I took it to show them. They liked it and published it under the name *Super Invaders*.

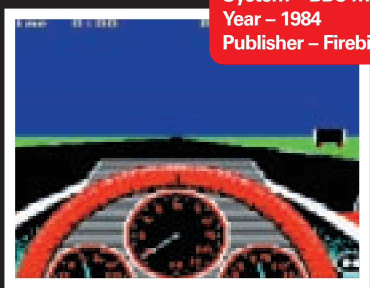
R: And what was it that initially drew you to the BBC Micro? Was the machine much easier to program than others?

GC: I saw it at a trade show at a time when I was thinking of getting a computer to play around with. It seemed to have the best spec of all the machines I had seen up till then. I was particularly impressed by the 320 x 200 resolution with four colours! I ordered it at the show and then, because it wasn't yet available, had to wait a further six months for it to arrive.

R: One of your early titles was a Spitfire simulator entitled ***Aviator***. It must have been quite tricky to recreate flying around in a plane on the BBC but you pulled it off perfectly…

GC: It was what I had originally thought I would do when I bought a home computer. However, *Super Invaders* had just been published and so I developed *Aviator* expecting it to be published by Acornsoft rather than just doing it as a hobby – in the end it took me a year to complete. It was my first experience of writing real-time simulator code and I also had to learn about the principles of flight and the characteristics of the Spitfire.

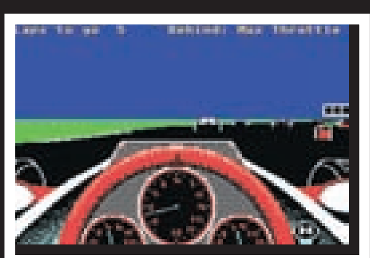
I was completely hooked on what I was doing but realised I would have to leave work and do it as a full time job if I was to continue. I had been working evenings and weekends and had also been taking unpaid leave in order to get the game finished. My wife's patience was wearing thin as was my employer's. As soon as *Aviator* was published Acornsoft asked me to do a racing game. I would be working with a Formula 3 driver they were sponsoring called David Hunt (brother of F1 world champion James Hunt). I quickly agreed, left work and started games programming as a full-time career.



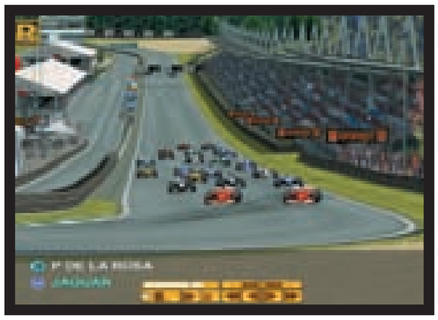
System – BBC Micro
Year – 1984
Publisher – Firebird

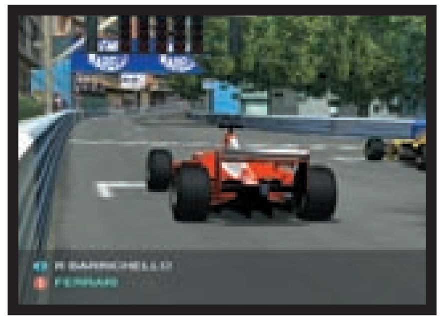
REVS

Never mind the fact that the original *Revs* only featured one track; it's still a stunning accomplishment. It may look a little rough around the edges nowadays, but the gameplay itself is still solid. The recreation of Silverstone was perfect considering the machine's limitations and *Revs* was further enhanced by its realistic physics – a trait of all Crammond's games – and some superb artificial intelligence. An enhanced version for the Commodore 64 appeared two years later featuring Brands Hatch, with a further three tracks, Donington Park, Oulton Park and Snetterton added to a second BBC Micro outing.



▲ Only one track, and yet the original *Revs* managed to keep BBC owners glued to their computers for hours.





R: Tell us a little more about ***Revs***. Did it take a long time to complete?

GC: In all, *Revs* took me about a year to write. I had to derive a driving model and wanted to come up with fast, 3D, solid-filled graphics which were not at all common at that point in time. Fortunately, I was able to visit David Hunt's F3 team at Silverstone, which was owned and run by none other than Eddie Jordan, and was lucky enough to get close up to the car and receive reams of valuable technical data from his engineers.

R: People are still playing ***Revs*** (someone recently posted a score time of 1:23.8 on Silverstone) why do you think the game remains so popular with gamers?

GC When I look at it now, I can't believe how primitive it looks, but at the time I was very much into driving it, honing lap times and I thought the graphics were fine. I think the brain gets used to limited resolution and colours. If the motion is realistic the brain is capable of interpreting the scene and fills in some of the missing detail, so I presume the gameplay must be rewarding enough to keep people playing it.

R: How did your initial collaboration with Firebird come about?

GC After I had done *Revs* on the BBC, Acornsoft and I decided that I would do a conversion of *Revs* on the Commodore 64 since it also used the 6502 processor. Annoyingly, it only had half the clock speed so I had to rewrite a lot of stuff to speed it up by making use of the extra available memory. By the time I had finished it, Acornsoft had decided not to publish it as it was only supposed to promote Acorn Computers, so instead we did a publishing deal with British Telecom's Firebird.

"IF I SEE A GOOD IDEA IN ANOTHER GAME I FEEL MORE INCLINED NOT TO USE IT. I LIKE TO BE ORIGINAL"

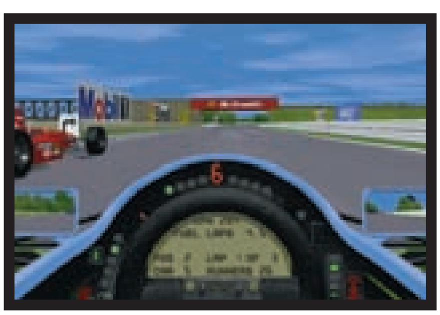
R: After ***Revs Plus*** on the C64, you went back to the BBC and released an enhanced version with several new tracks. Was there much pressure to create a sequel?

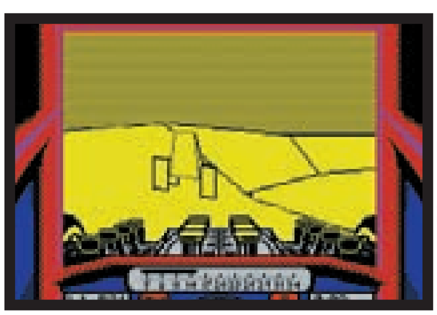
GC I wasn't aware of any pressure, but then Firebird was dealing with me via Acornsoft as far as *Revs* was concerned. Not long after *Revs* was published on the Commodore 64, Acornsoft decided to stop publishing games. I had already started developing *The Sentinel* which had taken me six months to write. Just before it was finished I took it in to show Firebird and they were so impressed that I entered into a contract directly with them.

R: Tell us a little about ***The Sentinel***…

GC I had the idea of the 3D landscape and moving around the landscape enjoying a real-time experience but without requiring real-time rendering. That is, you could render a scene from any viewpoint and it didn't matter if it took a long time to render. That meant that you would be able to have detailed scenery on machines like the BBC Micro and C64. I then realised that if the screen co-ordinates were mapped using the angle instead of the tangent of the angle then a scene could be scrolled across the screen with only the edges needing to be refreshed real-time.

Having had this technical idea I then had to think up some gameplay. I developed the landscape





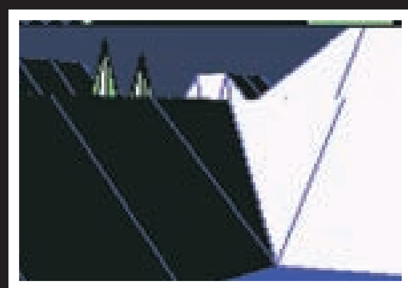


THE SENTINEL

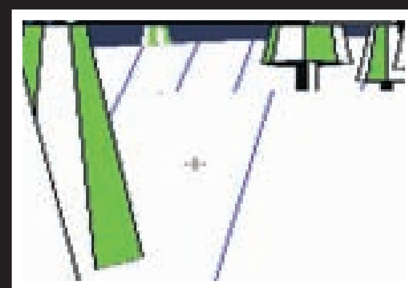


System – Various
Year – 1986
Publisher – Firebird

The Sentinel **proved quite a departure for Crammond, but is seen by many as his best work. A wonderful take on a traditional board game, *The Sentinel* saw you continually climbing the impressive landscape and eventually trying to absorb your titular enemy. Of course, while you were trying to reach your nemesis he was constantly searching for you and would deplete your energy once you were inevitably spotted (few will forget being scanned for the first time). Luckily, it was possible to recover lost energy by absorbing the essence of nearby trees – the end result was extremely atmospheric. *The Sentinel* certainly wasn't without its problems: it chugged along painfully on the 8-bit systems, but for many this simply added to the charm of *The Sentinel*. An absolute classic.**



▲ Compared to Crammond's other more simulation-based efforts, *The Sentinel* was a real surprise – anelaborate game of hide and seek.



▲ Such a simple concept, and yet the tense atmosphere created as you stalked your enemy across the landscape was incredible.

system and movement first and then gradually the game took shape. I capitalised on the idea of viewpoint being all-important. Perhaps the concept of mass = energy naturally flowed from my physics background.

R: Was it disappointing when Firebird was sold?
GC No, not really. British Telecom had decided it no longer wanted to do games publishing and simply sold the Firebird and Rainbird publishing rights and contracts to Microprose. I then found myself signing a transfer agreement which I quite liked as Microprose was already well known for its simulation titles.

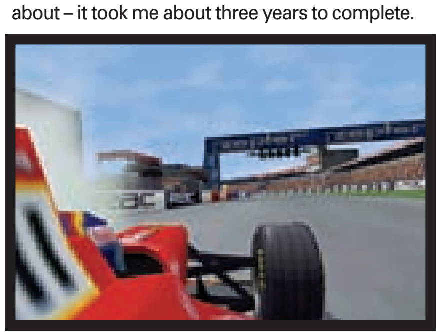
R: Where did the original concept for ***Stunt Car Racer*** come from?
GC *Stunt Car* came about through pure evolution over the space of a few months. I started doing a game where a big-wheeled vehicle drove over a landscape with random terrain. I found that the best fun was when the random landscape happened to make a sort of ramp and the vehicle took off and landed some distance away. I then made the landscape into a flat plain with some ramps on it. There was a problem lining up with the ramps, so I eventually decided to join the ramps with a track, but to avoid driving off the track onto the plain it would be raised everywhere. I decided on banked corners, mainly because I didn't want it to be a road racing game where you have to brake, turn in, apex and exit; it also seemed to fit the idea of ramp driving, ie, wall of death-type driving.

I toyed with various names like 'Stunt Buggy' but then with a front engine 'Stunt Car' seemed better. I was thinking that timed laps would be the challenge but found that it just needed the fun element of wheel-to-wheel racing, and so it became 'Stunt Car Racer'. Then I did the multiplayer mode with two linked machines because that seemed like good fun as well as an interesting technical challenge. That's how it came about – it took me about three years to complete.

Someone once suggested in a magazine that I had been inspired by Atari's game called *Hard Drivin'*, but that absolutely did not happen. *Stunt Car Racer* was fully developed by the time I became aware of *Hard Drivin'* and then I only saw screen shots of a loop the loop which I didn't use. I have always found that if I see a good idea in another game I feel more inclined not to use it because I like my games to be as original as possible. For that reason, since my first game *Super Invaders*, I've always avoided looking at rival products, so that my hands are not tied. If I think of a good idea and later it turns out someone has already done it, then I don't mind it being in my game as well because I haven't ripped off the idea.

R: Even today ***Stunt Racer*** has a superb realisation of speed and height. Why do you think it's remained so popular?
GC I think playability is always a vital ingredient for longevity. I spent a lot of time developing the driving model to allow cars to remain controllable







FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX

Along with *Stunt Car Racer*, *Formula One Grand Prix* is the title that made Crammond a household name, and became a labour of love for him. Indeed, Amiga Power was so impressed with the finished product that it went on to dub Crammond 'Sir Geoff'. When you consider the amount of ground that *Grand Prix* covered, it's amazing to think that Crammond managed to get the game running at all. No stone had been left unturned and the end result was a staggering number of options that demanded to be learnt – and learnt quickly. Those hoping for arcade thrills would be in for a disappointment, but everyone else discovered one of the greatest and most accurate simulators ever made. Crammond returned to his beloved franchise over the next ten years, with *Grand Prix 4* finally debuting on the PC in 2002. With his five games, Crammond totally revolutionised gamers' perceptions of *Formula One* titles and created one of the most popular computer franchises the home computer market had ever seen. Who knows what he might accomplish if he ever made a sixth…



▲ A massive step up from Revs, *F1GP* ended up being one of Crammond's most well known titles.

System – Amiga, Atari ST, PC
Year – 1992
Publisher – Microprose

despite the punishment they take. And then there are the balanced gameplay elements to consider like the boost and damage.

R: Were there any difficulties creating the 8 and 16-bit versions of ***Stunt Car Racer***?

GC Well, I actually completed the C64 version first and then went on to create the ST and Amiga versions. Pete Cooke created the Spectrum version by converting it from the C64 code, while Tim Ansell completed the PC version before the ST and Amiga outings were available. In hindsight it might have been better to wait for them to be done first, but Tim did a great job converting the original C64 code. I see Tim's done very well for himself since then with his *Total War* stuff and getting to use his impressive engine for TV programs, I'm really pleased for him.

R: Is ***Stunt Car Racer Pro*** still on the way? We're dying to know what's happened to it…

GC Unfortunately *Stunt Car Racer Pro* has now been cancelled. Lost Toys closed its studio and although I tried to revitalise the project with another team for another year I decided in the end, for various reasons, to finally call it a day.

R: How did you find the transition from 8 to 16-bit computers?

GC I absolutely loved it. I've always liked getting more powerful machines with better graphics, because I can do things on them that simply weren't possible the first time around.

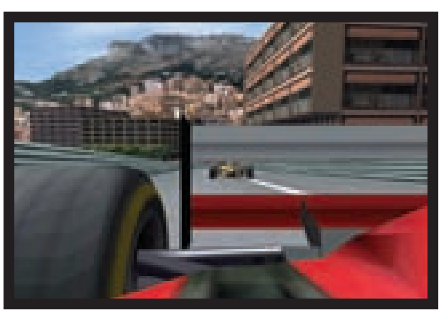
R: Why the huge interest in Formula One? And why did you decide to create ***F1GP***?

GC Ever since doing *Revs* I had remained interested in motor racing. I had started following the Formula One Grand Prix weekends and the fortunes of drivers such as Mansell, Prost and Senna. I knew I wanted to eventually create my own F1 game.

I then got a call from Microprose saying they were talking with McLaren about possibly doing a tie-in and wanted to know if I would be interested in writing a Formula One game. McLaren was a dominant team at that time and so it seemed like an ideal thing to do especially as it had been something I had already been considering. Although we did meet up with McLaren, a deal was never actually finalised. By then though, I was far enough advanced with *Formula One Grand Prix* that we could simply carry on without the tie-in anyway.

R: The original game couldn't have been very easy to put together…

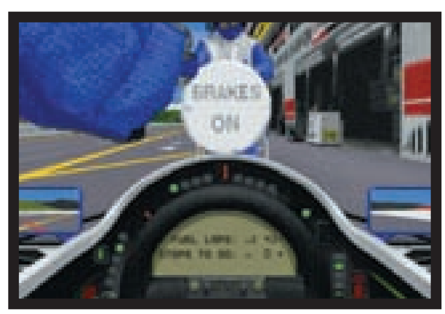
GC Like *Stunt Car Racer* it ended up taking me three years, and every aspect of the game was a challenge. I ended up having to create a new graphics engine, a new car simulator, driver artificial intelligence, sound, track system, pits with pit crew, pit stops with tyre changes and wet-



▲ The famous Monaco track, perfect in every incredibly tricky detail.



▲ It might not look it, but *Revs* still compares favourably to other racers…



▲ Even mundane tasks like pit stops were made realistic in *Grand Prix 2*



▲ Why is it that from this angle, we're hoping that someone crashes?

weather racing, marshalls to clear up the broken down cars, etc. Luckily, this didn't involve me having to work ridiculously long weeks. After I did one track I employed my brother-in-law Norman Surplus to use the track system to create the other 15 tracks in the game, and half way through the project Microprose hired Pete Cooke to do the menu code. Towards the end I hired my other brother-in-law to help with the test-driving and performance work. Everyone had a job that suited their talents, so I ended up with a very good team.

R: You must have been really pleased with all the positive reviews…

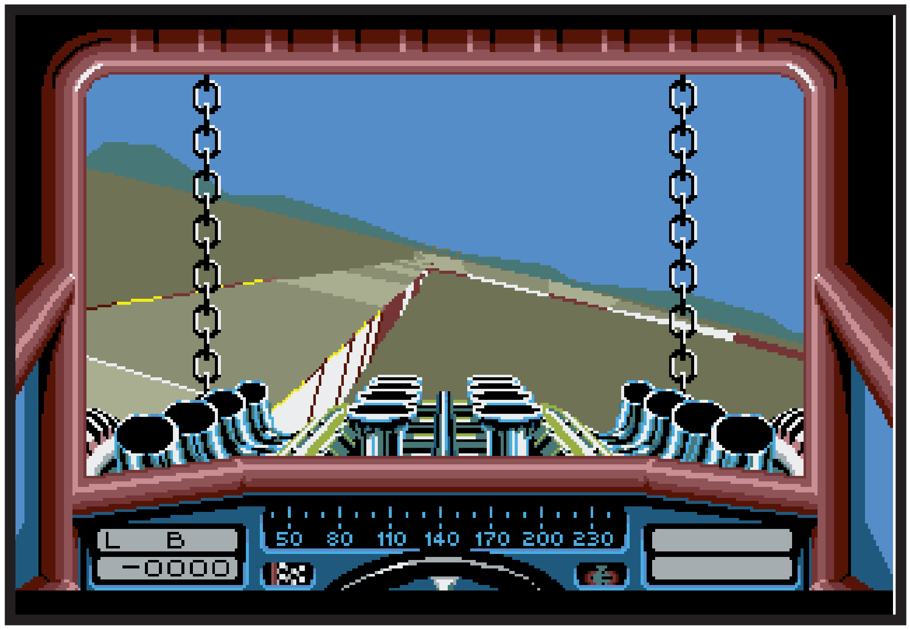
GC Of course I was, it was absolutely fantastic and a real spur to carry on developing the brand into something really special.

R: The sequel took three years to arrive, why such a long delay?

GC To be honest, it seemed to take me about three years to do each *F1* title I worked on. The graphics engine was a big part of that because I had to write a texturing engine and everything – all the tracks and cars needed texturing. Also the simulator was extended to make use of industry standard tyre models and a full suspension model among other things, and the number of set-up parameters improved significantly. Other major things were the telemetry data-logging system and the break up of cars in collisions. For *GP2* Pete Cooke worked directly for me, Norman still did the tracks and David was spending more time driving and assessing performance. So it was a very involved process.

R: ***Formula 1 Grand Prix 3*** doesn't now receive the same sort of respect as the other games in the franchise did, why do you think this is?

GC Well, when it first came out it got really good reviews and if you look around you'll see that five years on it's still a highly rated Grand Prix game. I suppose *Grand Prix 2* was such a big step up from *Grand Prix 1* that the expectation for *Grand Prix 3* was immense. If there was a problem it was, perhaps, that the graphics in other games coming out around that time made *Grand Prix 3*'s look a bit dated. Also a lot of the developments in *GP3* were not immediately obvious, particularly



▲ That critical moment at the start, waiting as you were lowered onto the track before racing away… these are the things that made Stunt Car Racer great.

in the simulator and AI, for example, you can't do 'doughnuts' in *GP2*.

R: ***Grand Prix 4*** was released to critical acclaim, but what happened to the proposed Xbox port?

GC The Xbox version was working extremely well and was, in fact, demonstrated to journalists. However, just after the PC version of *Grand Prix 4* was published, Infogrames decided to terminate the *Grand Prix* series and announced the closure of the studio. It's a real shame, but it was their right to make that corporate decision.

R: The series is renowned for its amazing physics engine, how long did it take to create?

GC Each game in the series involved significant model enhancements/changes, so I suppose that you're looking at around 12 years of development by the end of *Grand Prix 4.*

R: You're usually reluctant to talk to the press about your work. Why is this?

GC I've given several interviews over the years. One of the main reasons for not doing more has usually been because I've been too busy working on the code without the time or energy for anything else.

R: Can you give us any hints on what you're currently working on?

GC I'm doing this interview… As far as other projects go,-well, you'll just have to wait and see…

R: So how do you spend your free time when you're not coding?

GC I spend as much of my spare time as I can with the family mostly, although if I can I do like to find time to play the odd game of tennis, golf and online poker. From a game's point of view I'm currently learning how to fly with *Microsoft Flight Simulator.*

R: What do you think about the continued interest in retro gaming?

GC I think older games are excellent at giving the player instant accessibility, as you don't have to go through a big learning process to get in there and play it. Also, perhaps there is more variety of gameplay in the older games. Today, making games is so expensive that it's very risky to develop products that are completely different to anything else that's appeared before it.

R: And finally, how do you feel about Amiga Power dubbing you 'Sir Geoff', and has anyone been brave enough to use it?

GC I saw that plaudit as recognition for the quality of my work and as such I really appreciated it. Although I'm pretty sure that nobody has actually ever used it seriously.

"OLDER GAMES GIVE THE PLAYER INSTANT ACCESSIBILITY. TODAY ORIGINAL GAMES ARE RISKY AND EXPENSIVE TO DEVELOP"

STUNT CAR RACER

Only a British coder could put some cheese on a helter-skelter and create the definition of racing joy



Release: 1989
Format: Amiga, Atari ST, C64
Publisher: Micro-Style
Developer: Geoff Crammond

YOU'VE BEEN SPOILED BY DOLBY DIGITAL

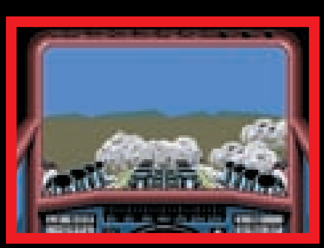
Stunt Car Racer may not have had the most believable engine sound, but considering that the game was set in the future (2008) who's to say that vehicles won't drone just like Crammond predicted? It wasn't the engine's noise that added to the racing experience however; it was the sound of grinding metal triggered when you started to ruin your car. This was the automotive equivalent of crossing fingernails down a blackboard with the response you'd expect should you find yourself bayoneting a screaming android to death. Beautiful. It was also given *coup-de-grâce* by an audio treat when you drove yourself to destruction, which sounded like a robotic gang rape in a saucepan factory.

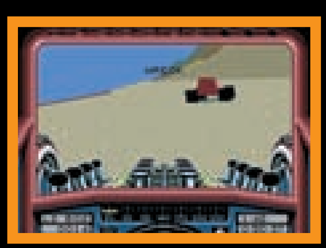
The Commodore Amiga 500 came in a box just wide enough to slip into a 60-litre rucksack. A minor detail, but an important one if it's 1989 and you intend to cycle the six miles from your house to your friend's and dabble with a hitherto seldom-used technology: serial cable link-up. 3.5-inch floppy disks could be bought in packs of ten and fitted snuggly in the complementary plastic case which, in turn, fitted snuggly in a side pocket. Goodbye, farewell and adieu, weekend: hello hours of link-up *Populous*, *Falcon* and that most truly wonderful of games *Stunt Car Racer*.

It's easy to get romantic when considering a game that brought friends together, but what makes one third of Geoff Crammond's finest hour worthy of classic status is because it still plays as excitingly today as it did (Jesus!) 16 years ago. 16-bit technology provided enough backbone to enable raised tracks based on humps and jumps and a rival car that looked like the offspring of the union of a roller skate and a doorstop. It moved with incredible slickness while the chunky physics engine provided the perfect mix of fat-wheeled bounce and leviathan weight to make precise use of a nitro boost that was ingratiatingly essential for pumping tracks that featured multiple jumps placed one after the other. Power sliding may have still been *OutRun*'s bounty, but when it came down to a genuine sense of physicality then *Stunt Car Racer* was more or less completely untouchable.

It wasn't just a physics engine and a steady frame rate that made *SCR* such a joy. Its personality was so strong and its coding so tight that the Commodore 64 version was equally worthy of celebration. It was a charmer in all aspects of its design, from the simplicity of its ethos to the design of its damage system.

Treat your car with disdain, slosh it round corners or skim the rim of the track with your underbelly and you would encourage a crack to run from the left to the right of the top of your chassis. When it completed its journey, you were wrecked and your opponent claimed extra points and won the









▲ Those massive ramps really took a lot of your car if you hit them wrong – one mistake and it's all over…

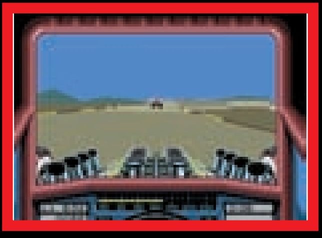
race. There was no billowing smoke or rattling metal clanging on the side of your ride to ruin your race, but there was certainly no denying the sinister nature of this simple crack. You knew you were hurting your baby when you treated it so bad, and it wasn't pleasant.

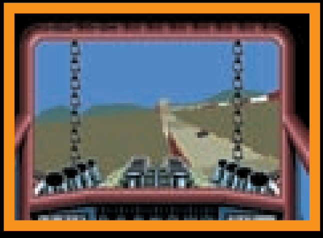
On top of this unique damage bar came the use of permanent structural damage inflicted should you take a hill at high speed or the wrong angle and plant it into the block colour of the desert below and you would earn a hole drilled to the right side of the structural damage bar, effectively shortening its length and therefore how much more casual damage you could take. These holes would last for an entire racing season and provided breathtaking moments when Player One would enter a race partially destroyed but with no penalty to handling. Victory came with a sweetness that could induce a digital diabetic coma of pure joy.

Serial link-up was not the game's *raison d'être*, of course; it was a capability available only to the lucky that owned the technology and the will to carry a large box a great distance, and so *Stunt Car Racer's* artificial intelligence comes into focus. Opponents had characteristics reflected in their names. Some were cautious and pedestrian and provided tortoise-and-hare lessons on the tortuous tracks; some drove as though the driver was listening to Motorhead's *Ace Of Spades* while escaping a shotgun wedding; and some were just downright rude.

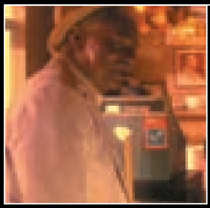
While most racing games have you start on the grid ready to go, *Stunt Car Racer* had you lowered from an unseen crane. This meant that the very first sensation was that of being a huge mass dropped from enough height to make the suspension of your wheels absorb your weight. Before you had even accelerated you knew you were heavy, and if you'd just been punished by a fall and were being placed back on the track, these moments provided ample time for adrenaline to course through your body and prepare for your comeback. Jaw clenched, eyelids retreating to take in the track. Ready. Steady. Go.

Is there a modern equivalent to *Stunt Car Racer*? Condemningly, no. Monster truck simulations and destruction derbies are pantomime in comparison, and the modern game's flirtation with its own take on 'reality' have meant that there is still a doorstop/roller skate gap in the market, ready and primed for a sequel – what a shame we're now unlikely to ever see one…

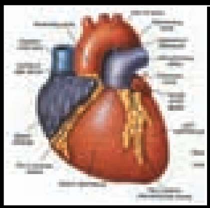




OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1989



AT THE MOVIES
1989 was the year when Spike Lee was the most exciting director in America and *Do The Right Thing* was the absolute apex of his career. Racial tensions boil over during a hot summer in Brooklyn and the resultant dialogue was superb.



ON THE RADIO
"Close your eyes and give me your hand. Do you feel my heart beating, do you understand?" Both truly disgusting and epically beautiful, The Bangles' theme to a million school disco touch-ups was a slow-dance/grope favourite. Get on!



ON THE NEWS
After WW2, Berlin was split into two: East and West. It probably seemed like a good idea at the time. In 1989 the wall that divided the city came down. Was it worth it considering that the next year German rockers Scorpions inflicted *Winds Of Change* on us? No.



ON THE CATWALK
Get your giant Joe Bloggs jeans, wear a nasty and brightly coloured top and have a shit haircut and you were there, our kid. We'd like to be able to prove that teen pregnancies fell as a direct result of such idiocy, but they didn't. What. The. Hell.



Classic Game

LOVED BY HARDCORE FANS THE WORLD OVER AND YET IT'S BARELY EVER MADE IT OUT OF JAPAN. SO WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES FIRE PRO WRESTLING SO AMAZING?

RING OF FIRE



▲ Having up to eight players in the ring at once makes for some particularly hectic action, plus lots of shouting and genuine punching among friends.



▲ Copyright issues might have stopped Human using recognisable names, but that didn't stop it putting familiar faces in under alternate titles.



▲ Cage matches prove particularly nasty, especially if you duke it out long enough for those explosive after-effects to go off with a bang…

Gamers who are wrestling fans, and who profess to be in the know, will be quick to inform all and sundry that the greatest wrestling game of all time is *WWF No Mercy* on the N64. Five years on from that game's release, all wrestling games seem to tremble in its shadow. But there's another group of wrestling-fan gamers who are even deeper in the know. These people will tell you that *No Mercy* isn't half as good as its Japanese counterpart *Virtual Pro Wrestling 2*. And they'll also tell you that neither game is in the same league as the all-powerful, genre-dominating 2D masterpiece that is *Fire Pro Wrestling*.

The Fire Pro brand is not only an incredible achievement in terms of the developer's approach to producing a title that boasts pure, unfussy gameplay, it's also a lesson in how to garner loyalty and love from a videogame fanbase.

Gamers who understand *Fire Pro* believe that the developer's first concern is a respect for two industries that they adore – professional wrestling and videogames.

It all began with Human Entertainment. Human, a company better known in the West for the *Clock Tower* titles on the SNES and PlayStation, became aware that many of the wrestling games built around Japanese Puroresu (pro-wrestling) promotions were not connecting with the fans. Most of these titles were button-bashing, arcade-style efforts that simply didn't appeal to the technical wrestling leanings of most of the Japanese puro fan community. Human couldn't compete for these lucrative licences, so it took advantage of some of Japan's very lax copyright legislations and created *Fire Pro Wrestling*. The game, which crept out on the PC-Engine in the summer of 1989, kept the likenesses of legendary Japanese and American wrestlers but craftily altered their names. The wrestling fans, who could recognise their favourites after seeing a few beautifully animated moves, realised that while there wasn't a licence attached, the tool for their Dream Match was finally in their hands. Human had caught fire in a bottle.

The *Fire Pro* series had a slow but steady evolution; the control system has remained the same since the game's conception. Simply put, Human got it right first time, and all that was needed was to steadily improve what was already present and correct. *Fire Pro*, for those of you not yet fortunate enough to step inside its ropes, has a control system that's beautifully simple yet staggeringly deep. It's perhaps best understood by considering it alongside other 2D stalwarts. *Street Fighter*, for example, offers instantaneous joy for the new player – but a master player pulling Ryu's strings will kill any newcomer dead. The same can be said for *Fire Pro*. In the hands of an *FPW* veteran, Kenta Kobashi or Ric Flair will seem an insurmountable challenge for someone making their ring debut. This distinction between veteran and first-time player, this gulf in skill and class that a player can endeavour to widen or narrow by putting in the hours, is the true mark of a multiplayer classic. It's also the main factor that sets *Fire Pro* apart from the endless rubbish that hits Western shelves in the name of wrestling gaming.

THE EVOLUTION

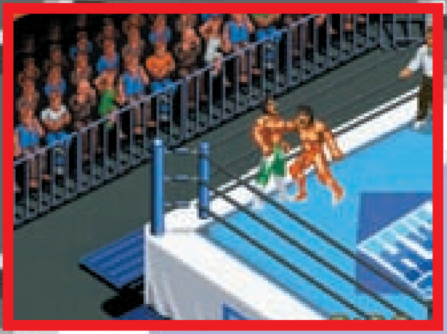
In the few years that followed that first quiet release, Human expanded the game's roster, and started to fill the title out with things the fans were asking for. In 1993 and 1994 *SFPW3* and *SFPW Special* arrived on the Super Famicom, and Human shaped up for big changes. A major player in this transitional period in *Fire Pro* history was Goichi Suda, the *killer7* creator now regarded as one of the most exciting minds in the industry. Suda is the prime example of a *Fire Pro* developer. Wrestling obsessed, his wonderful *killer7* features a masked wrestler as a playable character, and with his previous title – the animated. The ability was there to create your own fighter. *SFPWX* was the game that established the series as the giant of the genre. Indeed, years later, as the SNES emulation community started to kick off, *SFPWX* emerged as a new-found classic among wrestling fans. Here was a five-year-old game that bettered any wrestling game in stores in the West. The legend started to spread.

Fire Pro, in the meantime, diversified. There were women's wrestling games, like the ▶

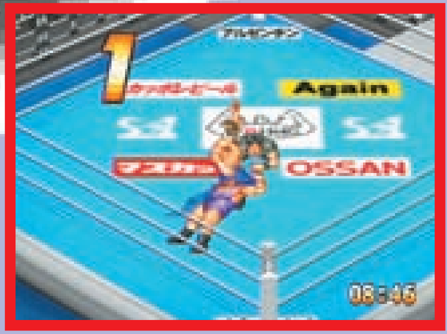
FALLS COUNT ANYWHERE

Fire Pro seems to pop up on every platform, no matter how ill-suited that platform might be. We've already looked at the PC-Engine, SNES, Saturn and Dreamcast versions, but the Wonderswan version demands a little more focus. The WonderSwan was a nice little handheld, but even its biggest fans would agree that its controls didn't really lend themselves to ports of action-intensive games. And yet, somehow, the WonderSwan version of *Fire Pro* managed to overcome the technical and practical limitations of the machine. It's one of the greatest examples of the solidity of *Fire Pro*'s game mechanic. It simply works. In fact, there hasn't been one true version of the game that doesn't do the series proud (as long as we ignore the ill-fated *Iron Slam '96*, a silly and unnecessary venture into 3D for *Fire Pro*). For that reason, it'll be worth keeping an eye out for the mobile phone version of *Fire Pro*, which is out now in Japan. This might be the true test of the game's seemingly limitless adaptability. The mobile phone is not the ideal gaming device so will *Fire Pro* still find some way to work its magic? We'd hazard a guess





▲ If you've never seen genuine Japanese wrestling, we'd suggest you check it out – it's technically far superior to anything the WWE has to offer.



▲ It's the little touches, such as differences in each wrestler's movements or the way the referee reacts to near pinfalls, that makes *Fire Pro* special.



▲ Check your watch… know what time it is? That's right – it's time, it's time, it's Vader time. Or quarter to six, if you're using the 24-hour clock.

brilliant *Queen's Special*, and there was the ill-advised misfire of *Iron Slam '96*, *Fire Pro*'s first and last venture into the 3D arena. Sega's Saturn was blessed with *6 Man Scramble*, which is still considered a high point of the series. The Saturn multi-tap offered the opportunity for six men in the ring at once – a gaming joy that had to be experienced to be believed. The PlayStation saw the release of *Fire Pro Wrestling G*, with a massive roster of 194 wrestlers and PocketStation support. The fans, as ever, were pleased.

What must be understood about the *Fire Pro* story is that while the game had a voracious following, the title was still appealing to a niche audience. *FPW* games were hungrily snapped up by fans, but there were no smash-hit titles. There was no crossover appeal. The developer stuck so closely to its beliefs – that licences were unnecessary, that the 2D engine it had built was near-perfect, that there was no need to labour the product with gimmicks and crass selling points – that it isolated itself from the mass market. *Fire Pro Wrestling G* was the last *FPW* game from Human Entertainment, and the company went under late in 1999.



A NEW DIRECTION

The *Fire Pro* story could have ended there. If it had, we would never have seen the release of a title considered by many as the most important wrestling game of all. That game is the landmark puroresu powerhouse that is *Fire Pro Wrestling D*. The Japanese devco Spike, which had a relationship with Human, stepped in to buy the rights to the *Fire Pro* name and established an internal team of *FPW* veterans to focus on the future of the series.

The next title was to be released on Sega's Dreamcast, and the power under that console's hood allowed the developer to pursue the *Fire Pro* philosophy of improvement, enhancement and expansion like never before. The roster size exploded – 220 wrestlers featured, representing every major global promotion. There were MMA fighters; an octagon was included; and a shootfighting element was nailed perfectly in place. Do the fans want exploding cage matches? Probably. In it went. Would the fans want brutal deathmatches with boards covered in barbed wire, fluorescent strip lights as weapons, and crimson deathmask blade jobs? Of course they would. In it all went. The Wrestler Edit mode, which had been great before, became a thing of unmatched beauty. Hundreds of edit slots, and the ability to create almost anyone, with so many moves to choose from you'd spend all night deciding which headlock best suited your Mick McManus CAW. The Dreamcast's online capabilities were exploited too. Months after the release, Spike continued to release downloadable wrestling moves, taking fans' requests for which one they'd like to see next.

FPD was a game that gained a following worthy of its majesty. The fan community created massive edit packs of entire wrestling companies, and made them downloadable to all. The giant roster just kept getting bigger and bigger; you could spot an *FPD* fan no problems – he was the guy whose pockets were bulging with extra Virtual Memory Units. People shared stories online, telling each other about great matches they'd just taken part in, and there was an overwhelming sense of camaraderie. We are gamers, we are wrestling fans, we are *Fire Pro*.

The key to the appeal of *Fire Pro* is in the balance the game strikes between being a competitive game and a celebration of professional wrestling. It's not enough for a *Fire Pro* fan to beat their opponent, they have to work a great match too. *Fire Pro* is so true to its source that it encourages its players to think like wrestlers. It's a feat that could only be made possible by a development team who have an innate understanding of what makes wrestling great, and what makes games great. When two veteran *Fire Pro Wrestling* gamers sit down for a match, there is no shame in coming away defeated, as long as you've fought a thrilling bout. Indeed,

"THE INCREDIBLE FIRE PRO BRAND STANDS AS A LESSON IN HOW TO GARNER LOYALTY AND LOVE FROM A VIDEOGAME FANBASE"



RING AROUND THE WORLD

The *Fire Pro* community plays a big part in the continuing legend of the great franchise. This community wouldn't exist in the West were it not for the work of a few superfans who have helped bring an ease of use to this Japanese title. One of these fans is Edward Crowser, the American who was vice president of the Fire Pro Club back in the days of the Sega Saturn's *6 Man Scramble*. Crowser wrote review after review, submitting them to websites and forums all over the net, in an attempt to raise the profile of the game.

"I've never spent more time dedicating myself to any single videogame," says Crowser. "Why? Well, as a lifelong wrestling fan, once I discovered *Fire Pro* I finally realised that 'the' wrestling game had been created. A game had been made that finally incorporated the greatest wrestlers from all over the world and literally put hundreds of moves at your disposal. Any wrestler that plays videogames has at least heard about the game. Not everyone has played it, because it's so hard to import a system and translate the Japanese. But for the few that do, it becomes a passion. It is a game that transcends cultural barriers and in the professional wrestling videogame genre, it stands alone as the greatest wrestling videogame series ever created."

Crowser now helps run IWA East Coast Wrestling, an independent wrestling promotion in the US.

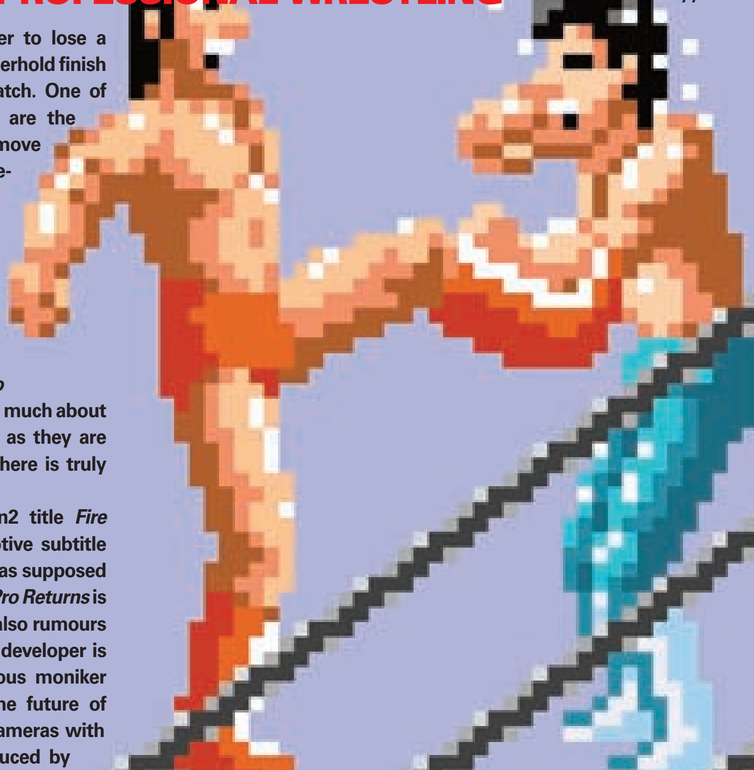






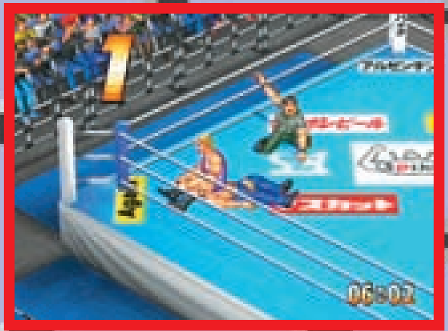
▲ Even the women got in on the action further into the *Fire Pro* series. Don't fancy yours much…

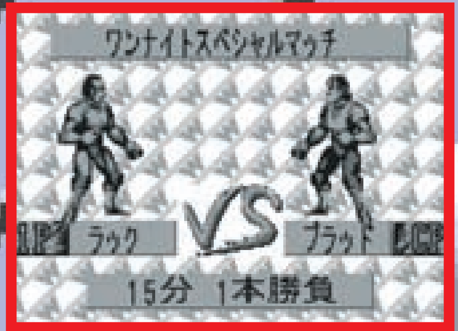
"THE KEY TO ITS APPEAL IS IN THE BALANCE BETWEEN BEING A COMPETITIVE GAME AND A CELEBRATION OF PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING"



there's always the sense that it's better to lose a tussle than to win with some cheap sleeperhold finish in the sixteenth minute of a boring match. One of the huge draws of the *Fire Pro* titles are the legendary Critical finishes, where one move can suddenly end a match with a bone-crunching snippet of animation and a quick flash of the word 'Critical!' on screen. The sight of the losing party in these Critical encounters cheering as their on-screen avatar lies motionless and beaten in the ring would baffle many multiplayer gamers in other genres, but this is where the *Fire Pro* magic is most apparent. The games are as much about the beauty of a perfect wrestling finish as they are about competitive videogame victory. There is truly little else quite like it.

Fire Pro will go on. The PlayStation2 title *Fire Pro Wrestling Z*, which carried the emotive subtitle 'Goodbye Fire Pro. Thank You Fire Pro' was supposed to be the last *FPW* game we'd see, but *Fi-Pro Returns* is due on PS2 any time now, and there are also rumours of a Nintendo DS title. Again, a masked developer is courting the media, under the mysterious moniker Mask de Spike. He's promising that the future of *Fire Pro* is bright, while posing for the cameras with clenched fists. *Fire Pro* is a game produced by wrestling fans for wrestling fans. It is a 2D warrior in an arena full of swaggering 3D steroid monsters. As long as there are wrestling and games, and there will always be wrestling and games, then there will be a place for *Fire Pro*. Thank you, indeed.





THE NAME GAME

As any *Fire Pro* fan will tell you, there's great fun to be had with the *Fire Pro* method of avoiding licensing issues – giving fake names to famous wrestlers. The good and the great in the wrestling industry have been renamed on many occasions by those fine fellows at Human, and there are some classic monikers that simply have to be made known to the general punter.

See if you can work out exactly who these fake names were assigned to over the years…

- A) Dick Slender
- B) Solid Gold Steam Odin
- C) The Undead Taylor
- D) Gigaton Joe
- E) Ax Duggan
- F) Big Snider
- G) Big Macho Small Snider
- H) Raven Gash

Answers
A) Ric Flair, B) Stone Cold Steve Austin, C) The Undertaker, D) The Big Show, E) Hulk Hogan, F) Rick Steiner, G) Scott Steiner, H) Kevin Nash


CLERIC L 1
16
WIZAR
8



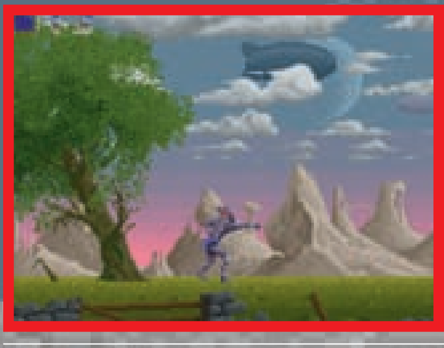
Cleric needs food, badly **The King Of Dragons Arcade [Capcom] 1991**

SHADOW OF THE BEAST

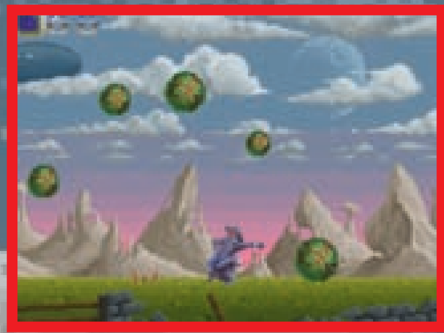
WHEN SHADOW OF THE BEAST ARRIVED IN 1989, IT ASTOUNDED AMIGA OWNERS – HERE WAS A GAME THAT SHOWED OFF THE CAPABILITIES OF COMMODORE'S MORE POWERFUL COMPUTER. WE SPOKE TO BEAST CO-CREATOR, PAUL HOWARTH, TO FIND OUT HOW HE AND MARTIN EDMONDSON PULLED OFF WHAT MANY THOUGHT WAS IMPOSSIBLE…



Behind the Scenes



▲ The combination of parallax scrolling (13 layers, the most ever for a game at the time) and lush visuals gave the game its much deserved reputation.



▲ Of course, there is an argument that more time should have been put into balancing the game's difficulty… it's bloody hard and no mistake.



▲ Punch, Mr Beast – punch with all your might. Those who left defeating this boss for too long wound up splattered against the wall behind you…

Release: 1989
Format: Amiga
Publisher: Psygnosis
Developer: Reflections

If you were an Amiga owner in the late Eighties, the one thing you feared above all else was quick and easy Atari ST ports. Now, we're certainly not going to suggest that Atari's machine had no good games, but considering the Amiga 500 was much more powerful, it was frustrating to see that the machine's potential wasn't really being reached. All that changed, though, with the arrival of Reflections' *Shadow Of The Beast*. Featuring gorgeous sprites, 13 layers of incredible parallax scrolling, and an absolutely stunning score, not surprisingly it was met with dropped jaws throughout the Amiga 500 community.

Shadow Of The Beast may have wowed gamers with its incredible aesthetics, but not everyone was in awe of its actual gameplay, or the game's ridiculous difficulty level. But then, *Shadow Of The Beast* was never really a game to begin with; that came much later… "*Shadow Of The Beast* came about as a result of the technical challenge that the Amiga represented," explains Howarth. "I had previously written *Ballistix*, which was little more than a port of the Atari ST version. While working on this project I was getting to grips with the Amiga and becoming more aware of its totally untapped power. What you have to understand is at that point in time, no one had properly used the Amiga's hardware, and so I set out to see just how far I could push the machine. After only a couple of weeks we had the fabled 13 layers of parallax scrolling up and running, and were pushing the Amiga to the max… or so I thought at the time."

With the demo in action Howarth and Edmondson decided to show off their latest creation; little did they realise just what it would mean, though. "Martin and myself were visiting Psygnosis in order to finish off *Ballistix*," Howarth recalls. "We thought we'd show off our technical demo to Psygnosis – they were absolutely blown away by it and wanted to sign it up immediately. I was rather worried, though, that it was only a scrolling demo, and I wasn't even sure if I could actually add a main character to it, let alone any baddies for you to fight. The managing director reassured me though, 'Don't worry, you'll work it out,' and that was how *Shadow Of The Beast* was born."

Beast's conception may have begun, but Howarth and Edmondson still had to figure out what type of game it would become, and more importantly, how they were going to cram a game into their demo that was already pushed to the max. It wasn't easy, but *Shadow Of The Beast* was eventually completed in around nine months – not bad considering much of the technology used was cutting edge at the time. "There were three main special effects in use that hadn't been seen before," continues Howarth. "Dual playfields: the background is effectively a different screen to the foreground. Multiplexed sprites: the Amiga has eight 16 x 16 pixel hardware sprites but you can 'cheat' and reuse them if you're clever, I used them to produce a whole mountain range. Parallax scrolling: the Amiga lets you hardware scroll the whole screen 'for free', but using the Copper, it's possible to scroll individual portions at different speeds, hence the parallax scrolling (which actually takes very little power to produce). Indeed, I had three very special friends that helped me out with the parallax, Paula, (Fat) Agnus and Denise; they were the names of the custom chips that made the Amiga so powerful."

MAKING MONSTERS

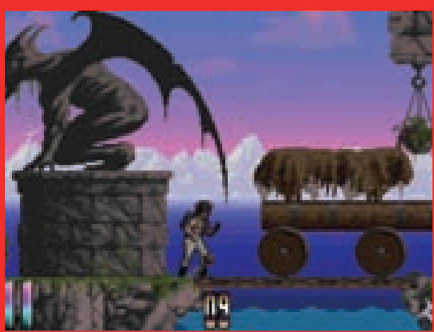
Even after these initial problems had been solved, the pair still had their work cut out, as the game still needed a protagonist and enemies to face. "Adding the monsters was one of the toughest parts," admits Howarth. "Once we had a scrolling demo I wasn't sure how to get anything more from the machine. However, with a little clever thinking and planning it became possible to address this issue." After viewing the end product, it's obvious to see that Howarth's original fears had been easily dispelled, most noticeably when you ▶

"I HAD THREE FRIENDS TO HELP ME MAKE THE AMIGA SO POWERFUL, PAULA, (FAT) AGNUS AND DENISE – THE NAMES OF THE THE CUSTOM CHIPS"

RETURN OF THE BEAST?

Howarth discusses a revitalisation of everyone's favourite beast…

The *Shadow Of The Beast* franchise may have officially ended 14 years ago, but Howarth is still optimistic that a fourth title could eventually appear at some stage in the future; although its likely to look nothing like the original *Beast* games. "Loads of people have suggested that I should get around to making a 'Beast 4'," he admits. "I've given it some thought, and would quite like to see it done as a first or third-person graphical adventure – a bit like *Tomb Raider* but with enhanced huge monsters and devious traps to negotiate."





▲ The original Beast game was beautiful, but things only got better for the sequels… and who could forget those hauntingly lyrical theme tunes?



▲ Originally, the game was just called Beast but Psygnosis renamed it to prevent gamers confusing it with other similarly-named titles.

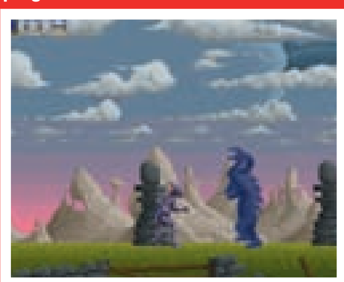
"BEAST MAY HAVE BEEN TECHNICALLY AMAZING FOR ITS TIME, BUT SUCH VISUALS COME AT A PRICE: LOADING TIMES TAKE FOREVER"

ON REFLECTION

Learning the hard way…

While Howarth is the first to admit that *Beast* may have been slightly lacking in the gameplay stakes, he'll also point out that the majority of its mistakes were eventually rectified in the game's two sequels. *Shadow Of The Beast 2* was completed in around a year, while the third title eventually ran over by a year and ended up taking twice as long to finish. Things got so hectic that Howarth finally had to enlist the help of Cormac Batsone, Awesome's programmer, so he could actually complete it.

The sequels also delved more into the trilogy's mythos, helping to explain how the main character Aarbron eventually regains his human form. Mostly though, people prefered the later games because they were so much easier to play, and had a greater emphasis on puzzle solving. We'd still recommend playing through the original *Beast* first, though, as an insight to how far the trilogy progressed…



met *Beast's* impressive bosses. Some of them were absolutely huge, and provided many of the game's greatest moments – even if they did give Howarth major headaches. "The bigger they came, the more processing power and memory they consumed," he recalls. "In reality they could have been even bigger if it wasn't for the American machines – as they can only move around 20 per cent less in a game frame than the European machines can. A pity really, but sadly, you do have to cater for both sides of the Atlantic."

While *Beast* is well known for its technical prowess, its startling visuals and haunting music are what most gamers remember. Both Edmondson and Howarth were big fans of fantasy art, and owned many books by the likes of Roger Dean and Rodney Mathews; it was these artists that provided the inspiration for the beast and his many enemies, which in turn, gave *Beast* its distinct look. If the visuals were gorgeous, then its uplifting musical score was positively stunning; the sort of haunting composition that stayed with you long after the game had ended. Howarth and Edmondson were great fans of Dave Whittaker and were keen to get him on board. "Fortunately, Dave was sourced through Psygnosis for us," recalls Howarth. "He'd done some work on other projects for them, and his stuff sounded absolutely fantastic for the time. From the minute we heard his music, there was no choice for us and we knew we had to have him."

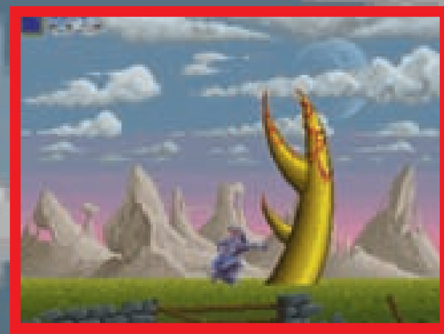
This title may have been technically astounding for its time, but the superlative visuals came at a price: loading times seemed to take forever. "I used to think they were really bad," admits Howarth. "But looking at some recent games that can take two DVDs around 20 minutes to install, the load times for the Amiga don't seem that harsh nowadays. We actually spent a lot of time optimising the load times on the Amiga – they could have been much worse. We even twisted the data around physically on the disc so each track was aligned in just the right place, allowing for the time it takes for the drive head to step from one track to the other."

Loading times aside, *Beast* was a revelation when it appeared, and instantly caused a huge commotion in the gaming press. Indeed, Howarth remembers walking past a local games shop and seeing a poster which simply declared '*Shadow Of The Beast* – the reason to buy an Amiga'. Of course, considering the amount of extras that Psygnosis had decided to include, it was little wonder that Reflections' new game was so desirable. As with many Psygnosis titles, *Shadow* came complete with some incredible box art by Roger Dean. Not only that, the limited edition boxes came with gorgeous t-shirts, which have now become extremely desirable, and subsequently, very hard to get hold off. Although Howarth and Edmondson had no say in *Beast's* packaging, they weren't too worried about the lack of input. "We saw the prototypes and, of course, had no issues at all," confirms Howarth. "Psygnosis was using the biggest boxes it had ever used so of course we loved them."

PUBLIC OPINION

With *Shadow Of The Beast* finally in the shops, gamers were soon getting to grips with the stunning looking title with decidedly mixed results. Many found the gameplay too limiting and basic, and felt that it hadn't really progressed on from the many 8-bit titles that had come before it. Others felt that the game was just too damned hard for its own good, and that there weren't enough combat moves in it. While the beast had a fairly limited number of moves he did gain access to a jetpack and gun on the later stages – not that these additions made the game any easier. "*Beast* was tough, no doubt about it," confirms Howarth. "In those days there was very little playtesting. Psygnosis didn't even have a test department. At the time we were looking to give people a







challenge, and so we made sure that the game was just about possible to complete. I know I managed to complete it once or twice." Despite its extreme difficulty (there were plenty of cheats available to make it more manageable), Howarth was more than happy with the finished product and insists that it was as complete a game that the duo could make. "Back in those days, it was very much seat of the pants stuff," he admits. "We didn't really have a concept or plan but the game still did everything we wanted it to at the time."

If Howarth and Edmondson were happy with the eventual product, then Psygnosis was ecstatic, and it quickly commissioned *Beast* to appear on several other platforms ranging from the PC Engine to the humble Spectrum. Russell Kay and David Jones who had both worked on *Lemmings* handled the majority of ports, while later ones came under the jurisdiction of Real Time Worlds. As far as Howarth is concerned, though, the various ports were something of a mixed bag. "The FM Towns version was pretty good, and so was the PC Engine version," he reveals. "These two versions looked great compared to the original Amiga version. The FM Towns machine, for example, had 256 colours – loads compared to the Amiga's 32. Other ports (I won't name them) were simply not as good. I think sometimes games simply don't work on certain platforms." It's a fair point, and one that holds up well when you consider the Spectrum, Amstrad and Master System outings in particular. *Beast*'s main strength was its visuals, so inevitably owners of inferior systems ended up with a game that had few redeeming features.

Despite the shoddiness of several ports, and its sheer difficulty level *Beast* is still remembered fondly by many gamers. Howarth feels this is due to its technical merits, rather than the actual gameplay. "*Beast* definitely broke the mould and set a new standard for games," he admits. "It proved that cheap Atari ST ports were no longer acceptable, and showed off the true power of the Amiga. I think it's this huge leap forward in technology that has kept it in people's minds." While Howarth was in such a candid mood, it seemed a good time to approach the subject of style over substance – did he think that *Shadow Of The Beast* qualified? "Totally," he laughs. "My apologies to those that wanted an in-depth gaming experience when they purchased *Beast*. At the time, I counted myself lucky for actually being able to get *any* gameplay into what had started life as little more than a graphical demo…"

CLASH OF THE TITANS

O·P·E·R·A·T·I·O·N W·O·L·F

As gaming infiltrated the home market a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre, machine or even developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all that opposed him. First recorded in playgrounds in the early Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine, or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month, the 8-bit computer versions of the superb Taito hit *Operation Wolf* go head to head…

ROUND 1: VISUALS

COMMODORE 64: The C64's blocky sprites are infamous among retro gamers, but even we were shocked at what we saw here. Time has not been kind to this version of *Operation Wolf*. Ugly Lego-like men lurch around each level and have little in common with the sprites from the original game. Disappointing to say the least.

SPECTRUM: *Operation Wolf* on the Spectrum suffers from the old monochrome problem that plagues so many other Speccy titles. While the sprites are well detailed, smaller ones often get lost in the background, and can be hard to kill. A decent conversion that's ruined by dull looks.

AMSTRAD: This is more like it. Well-animated sprites (that don't look as if they were made by a six-year-old) and colourful backgrounds all combine to make a very swish-looking title. Out of the three 8-bit conversions, the CPC one looks most like its arcade parent – a great effort.

WINNER: AMSTRAD
RUNNER UP: C64

ROUND 2: AUDIO

COMMODORE 64: The C64 is always a strong performer in this category and *Operation Wolf* is no exception. Jonathan Dunn's remix of the original arcade tune is superb and really gets your trigger finger itching. The in-game spot effects are fairly basic, but this can be said for all three versions. The hands-down winner.

SPECTRUM: The Spectrum's sound chip once again lets it down and while the theme tune is fairly accurate it lacks the oomph that makes the Amstrad and C64 versions so enjoyable to listen to. The in-game sound effects are also poor, meaning that the Spectrum comes in far behind its competitors.

AMSTRAD: What we have here is a decent rendition of the *Operation Wolf* theme tune that's not only instantly recognisable but sounds the business as well. It's not as funky as the C64 outing, but it's a good effort and definitely gets you in the mood for gunplay.

WINNER: C64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

COMMODORE 64: The C64 scores easy points as it features a variety of play options, including mouse support. This makes aiming extremely responsive and gives you tighter control. The downside is that it moves rather sluggishly, which takes away some of the frantic gunplay that made the arcade title so good.

SPECTRUM: Although the Spectrum has a variety of control options, the visuals make this a lot harder to play. Items like grenades can be hard to spot against the monochrome background and you'll often find yourself missing valuable ammo. This is a shame as this is a strong effort that deserves to be played.

AMSTRAD: Though the Amstrad lacks the C64's mouse use, it makes up for this with speedy scrolling, solid controls and gameplay. While this is a much more accurate conversion in terms of visuals and feel, the C64's variety of controls tips the scales in its favour.

WINNER: C64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

AND THE WINNER IS…

C64

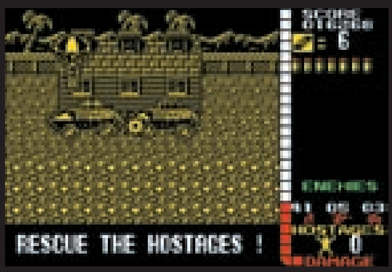
Never mind that it has some rather questionable graphics and that certain key scenes – like the hostage at the end of the second level – are missing (a problem affecting all three versions of the game). Simply embrace the fact that the C64 has another strong arcade conversion to boast about and one more notch on the Clash Of The Titans scoreboard.



The C64 version may not look the best, but it plays like a dream.



Alas, green and black graphics impede bullet-based action.





OPERATION WOLF (Various Home Systems) Ocean, 1988 – UK Advertisement



DAVID BRABEN

interviewed by DARRAN JONES

Many people think space-trading classic Elite has never been bettered... including its author. Now, David Braben talks to Retro about futuristic exploration, Nuclear War and the problems facing today's games industry

What goes through your mind when you think of *Elite*? Do you picture intricate wireframe graphics that were cutting-edge when you first saw them in 1984, or does your mind stray back to a time when all that mattered was amassing a huge fortune and visiting as many planets as possible? Regardless of what memories *Elite* may stir in you, the game would have been impossible without the genius of David Braben and Ian Bell. Sadly, Bell is no longer in the industry, but Braben continues to push boundaries, define genres and make great games.

Born in 1964, Braben was first drawn to the computer itself and not the games you could play on it. "I was fascinated with the concept of the computer before I owned one and I desperately wanted my own, but they were horribly expensive," he laments. "I eventually got an Acorn Atom in the very early Eighties and from that day on I was the proverbial bedroom programmer, essentially writing games for my own amusement."

As well as writing his own programs, Braben turned his attention to commercially available titles – particularly in the early days of gaming.

"There were so few games out at the time – I remember getting an Acorn games pack for Christmas one year and they were all utter rubbish," he laughs. "So I thought, 'I could do better than that.' I'd already written my own version of *Space Invaders* but the first game I actually wrote was based on *Missile Command*. Although I really liked it in the arcades, I didn't think it was always obvious what was going on, so I wrote this game called *Nuclear War*." Having a serious lack of hardware at his disposal, Braben found himself defacing the family TV in order to create the visuals for his first masterpiece – the unpublished *Nuclear War*.

THIS TIME IT'S WAR

"I had a picture of the northern hemisphere in my game, which in those days was a very big achievement because the amount of screen memory was very small," he recalls. "I loaded from tape this picture I had drawn of the world on my television with a chinagraph pencil and followed this up by drawing in all the pixels. The idea of the game was that you played either Russia or America and you had to keep firing missiles across at each other in this big parabolic path in order to destroy the other guy's city – so you had missiles raining down towards you and you could send airbursts to blow up them up, and in the meantime you were also sending missiles over to the other guy – it was a two-player game – and that was great fun. The score was based on the number of deaths on the other side so it wasn't terribly politically correct, but that's how it all started."

Creating *Nuclear War* proved to be a rite of passage for Braben, as it allowed him to understand the intricacies of working in Assembler, which he still uses today. "*Nuclear War* had the outer loops written in Basic

but I kept recoding sections of it in Assembler and it became a fantastic learning experience, because the Assembler ran so much faster than the basic code," he explains. "It meant that I could get something up and running very quickly, and from an understanding point of view it meant that I could free up the memory and use that for another picture in the game. It was a great trade-off and extremely useful, as the machine didn't have much memory."

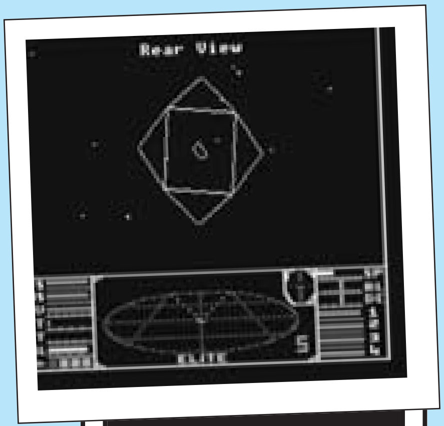
Despite tinkering with other people's work, when creating his own titles Braben was never really influenced by other games, though the space-based antics of *Defender* (of which he was a big fan) prompted him to embark on a little space odyssey of his own. "As soon as I got the Assembler working, I spent most of my time playing around with 3D and 3D starfields, which I found extremely fascinating and quickly decided to make a game based on it," he recalls.

"I put together a selection of spaceships and had them flying around in a 3D starfield just at the point that I started university [Jesus College, Cambridge, where he read natural sciences] which was also when I met Ian Bell. I showed him what I'd been tinkering around with and we soon got talking about what else could be included in it. *Elite* essentially formed from that."

A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY…

Although playing around with 3D starfields proved to be Braben's main inspiration for *Elite*, a certain George Lucas sci-fi epic helped shape the game's future. "*Star Wars* had just come out and I just loved the idea of that sort of thing appearing in a game," Braben says.

"Although *Elite* is set in a much more bleak world to *Star Wars*, the concept of flying to completely different places was very attractive. From the point of view of actually creating the game, I already knew that I could



IT ALL STARTS HERE

Elite blew gamers away with its unique wireframe visuals, sheer scope and unseen levels of freedom. Although you started off with just a hundred credits, your Cobra MkIII space craft soon opened up almost limitless possibilities to you.

Whether you lived out your Elite days as an honest trader or preferred the more swashbuckling (but dangerous) life of a pirate, the game always delivered. Every later edition of Elite came with countless new weapons, spacecraft or missions, so you'd often find avid fans with several copies of the game spread across various formats in their collection.

Perhaps the biggest achievement of Elite, though, was that the original game was coded to be contained within a measly 32K – a true achievement, especially when you realised that the original game contained over 280 trillion galaxies. That's a lot of space exploration…



SOFTOGRAPHY



In over two decades in the industry, David Braben has been involved with a range of great games

Elite, Acornsoft, Various Formats.............................1984

Zarch, Acornsoft, Archimedes....................................1987

Virus, Firebird, Various Formats................................1988

Frontier, Gametek, Various Formats........................1993

First Encounters, Gametek, Various Formats.........1995

Darxide, Sega/Frontier Developments, 32X...........1996



▲ Virus was a significant step away from Braben's previous titles, although it still offered a huge amount of exploration for players – sadly, the PSone sequel was nowhere near as enjoyable.



DAVID BRABEN

Darxide EMP is a handheld remake of the original 32X version of *Darxide* – it's rather cool.





render 3D starfields, whereas rendering landscapes was a whole different ball game. The idea of having a game where you have piracy and all that sort of thing, and you're getting attacked where there isn't a background to draw was a lot more attractive to me than having to draw a complicated landscape that you had to make look believable."

Elite became a huge success and since its 1984 release on the BBC Micro it has appeared on nearly every format. For many, the NES incarnation has impressed the most, but the Commodore 64 version caused the most headaches. "We'd already addressed a lot of problems with the initial game after working on the C64 version," recalls Braben. "The problem with the Commodore 64 is that it's a lot slower than a BBC Micro and so… we spent of lot of the time making the C64 version run faster. When we moved *Elite* across to the NES we wrote a version on the C64 that rather than simply draw a line from A to B, would instead draw a line into user-defined characters and then allocate them across the screen in a way so that it would look the same. Once we had that in place, it was relatively easy to move it across to the NES."

Despite the relative ease of porting *Elite*, there was another obstacle to consider… "The other problem we had to deal with was the NES's lack of a keyboard, so we came up with the icon strip approach which was taken from *Frontier*, as that was already under development."

Frontier was the follow-up to *Elite* – with the original proving so popular, it was inevitable that a sequel would appear. What wasn't so clear was how long it would take to arrive.

"I was quite ambitious in what I wanted to do between *Elite* and *Frontier*," Braben explains. "After we completed all the different versions of *Elite*, though, we essentially became '*Elite*d out'. Although Ian and myself had already started a punitive sequel to *Elite*, it didn't actually go anywhere. Ian, I think, wasn't really motivated to work any more, so we split the tasks up but it eventually became just myself working on it. Writing a game for five years can be quite soul-destroying, but also when you start it things move on so much while you're writing it. *Frontier* was really cutting-edge when I first created the graphics in 1988 and they were amazing for the time, but by the time *Frontier* was released in 1993 texture mapping was not unusual. While it was still okay when it came out, *Frontier* wasn't as good as it could have been and that's when I resolved to start Frontier Developments."

THE FINAL FRONTIER?

Formed in 1994, Frontier Developments (of which Braben is now chairman) has developed a range of titles for nearly every platform, including the popular *RollerCoaster Tycoon* series. However, in the studio's early days, it found the problems encountered with *Frontier* were nothing compared to issues surrounding *First Encounters*, *Frontier*'s sequel.

"*First Encounters* was scheduled for release in 1995 with a company called Gametek, who I was extremely unhappy with," Braben explains. "It got to the stage where I even offered to buy back the rights and

Thanks to publisher interference, *Frontier* turned out to be half the game it should have been. What a shame.



FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

Despite initially working with Ian Bell on a tentative sequel to Elite for the 8-bit machines, it soon became obvious to Braben that Bell no longer shared the same passion that he did. Bell later made various allegations against his development partner, including one that Braben had failed to pay an associate – claims that Braben was able to successfully disprove and they soon parted ways. Since then, the pair haven't been in touch with each other. "I've had no contact with him at all," reveals Braben. "I think he's become quite bitter. Quite why he's got out of the industry I don't know, but I've not seen him now for at least five years."

buy them out of their contract because I didn't want it to come out with them. They were trying to change so many things about the game; they were saying that they wanted it for DOS, when it had been written for Windows. A lot of things changed at the last minute and they still wanted to stick to the release date. I tried to block the release by saying that they didn't have a version of the game to publish, but Gametek threatened to release the pre-betas. I ended up with two weeks to create a patch that fixed most of the problems. It's sad thinking about what happened. We worked frantically to produce that patch, but they released the game without it, and by the time it was eventually released there were even more bugs. It was the perfect example of development hell."

Although he's been stung in the past, Braben is convinced that there are still things about the industry to enjoy though, as with many gaming veterans, he's dismayed by the lack of originality in today's market. "I think it's a real shame that it's now very hard to do original games and to get them accepted," he says. "I don't think it's because people out there don't want them, I think it's often for marketing and commercial reasons – that's a big shame." Piracy is also a worry for Braben, and as a relatively small developer he feels the effects more than most. "Shops often tend to take big orders of things like sequels and so the game sells a lot more before piracy kills it off. Whereas games that publishers aren't prepared to take a big risk on see fewer copies being made in advance; piracy still comes in at the same time, with the result being that it has a much deeper effect on the sales of the game. We did a study in Germany on *Virus*, which was a very successful game but there were still 30 copies to every original released. Amazingly, we were blamed for making the game on one floppy, which in turn made it easier to pirate."

With Braben currently putting the finishing touches to *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3*, he now finally look forward to returning to the worlds of *Elite* in *Elite 4*. Despite a slew of similar titles being produced over the last 20 years, Braben is adamant that none of the games currently available are able to match the original's ambitions. "[Other developers] miss the point of *Elite*; they don't understand what made *Elite Elite*. In terms of how to move the game forward I think the important thing with *Elite* was the freedom that it gave you, and a lot of these other games just don't give you that. Games like *Privateer* tend to railroad the player a lot more and I think that constrains the way the game works. There have been plenty of games since *Elite* but they've never captured the spirit."

THE FOURTH DIMENSION

It's unclear if even Braben himself will manage to unleash the exact magical ingredients that made *Elite* so much fun to play, but with his attention now firmly turned towards *Elite 4*, you can guarantee that he's going to try to recreate the magic. "It's still a way off," confirms Braben, "but what's important to me is that it's going to be worth the wait. What I don't intend to do is another also-ran *Elite*-alike because there are enough of those around already."

SOFTOGRAPHY CONT.



V2000, Grolier Interactive PC, PlayStation 1998

Infestation, Ubisoft, Various Formats 2000

Wallace & Gromit In Project Zoo, BAM! Entertainment, Various Formats, PlayStation2 2003

Darxide EMP, Frontier Developments, Various Formats 2003

RollerCoaster Tycoon, Atari, Xbox 2003

RollerCoaster Tycoon 2: Wacky Worlds, Atari, PC 2003

Dog's Life, SCEE, PlayStation2 2003

RollerCoaster Tycoon 3, Atari, PC 2004



▲ If you'd have told David Braben ten years ago that he'd go from creating one of the greatest games of all time to making a game about Wallace and Gromit, he'd have probably called you a loon. Probably.



▲ *Vagrant Story* is up there with the best of them when it comes to absorbing and visually stunning RPGs.



▲ Build up your weapons and one day you'll have a sword bigger than that great horned… thing.

GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT

Vagrant Story

SEEN IT IN GAMESTATION FOR A BIT MORE THAN MOST OF THE OTHER TAT? THERE'S A GOOD REASON FOR THAT…

Format: PlayStation
Release: 2000
Publisher: Square
Developers: In-House

While much of the world may know Square Enix for the *Final Fantasy* series and little else, there's a whole catalogue of gems that have been overshadowed by the world's biggest RPG series. From quirky delights like *Threads Of Fate* to spin-off silliness such as *Chocobo Racing*, Japan's purveyors of quality role play (not to mention the instigators of much excellent cosplay) have tried it all. And usually failed. But on 21 June 2000, Square released its most criminally underrated title yet in *Vagrant Story*, a game aimed squarely at the hardcore market (on the firm's own admission).

Taking on the role of Ashley Riot, a 20-something Riskbreaker with as troubled a past as any Square hero, you're dropped into a spiralling plot that extends far beyond the standard RPG fare. Risk itself brought a very tactical element to the game, meaning that while you were free to rattle off lengthy chain combos (once you mastered the timing, at least), accuracy and power would decrease slightly with each successive blow. The balance between continued attacking and tactics was struck all but perfectly, and just when you thought there were no more genres left to straddle you'd come to a well-designed puzzle or a beautifully realised cut-scene that gave you more background for Ashley.

As for whether opting for on-screen speech bubbles over straight text or speech was a technical or a stylistic choice, it's irrelevant. The end result is as unique and charming today as it ever was. And that's before we even get onto the brilliant sound, the incredible replay value for an RPG and the sheer depth and customisation. Overwhelming, to say the least.

One of the love/hate elements of *Vagrant Story* was the strange yet rewarding weapon system. This encouraged the player to not only assemble their own equipment but also to develop it, making it more effective on certain types of creatures. To best do this, you'd have to use the weapon exclusively on enemies of a single category – if you wanted to create a dragon-slaying great sword, for example, you'd need to solely slay lizards and suchlike until the edge was conditioned for doing so.

While this was a great touch and made some of the tougher boss battles a fair bit easier, it did require a lot of work. Building up the weapon was one thing but having to go into the menu and switch between several of them whenever a new type of enemy appeared (consecutive rooms often held quite varied threats) became something of a chore. Regardless, creating an awesome weapon that didn't even fit on the screen and took down enemies in a single blow was a thrill almost unrivalled to this day.

Through the eyes of a gamer who understands and appreciates just what it attempts and what it offers, *Vagrant Story* remains one of Square's strongest games. Aesthetically and stylistically, there can be little denial of its prowess, and even new titles like *Final Fantasy XII* are using a similar visual style. It should come as little surprise that *Vagrant Story* is a favourite in RPG circles (it was the first PSone game to receive a perfect 40 from *Famitsu* magazine) but we sincerely hope people haven't become too caught up in a generation of polygon bonanzas and crazy peripherals to spread the love a little further. Go on – you owe it to yourself.

SMOOTH CRIMINAL

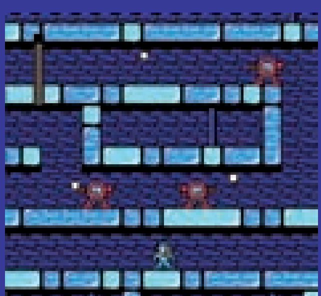
Forgive us as we stray a little from the retro path, but chuck the *Vagrant Story* disc in a PlayStation2 with the texture smoothing option turned on and get ready for a pleasant surprise. Much like *Parappa The Rapper* and *Metal Gear Solid*, Square's uber-hardcore RPG gets a noticeable makeover (more so than in most cases), and whether you're going back to *Vagrant Story* or playing it for the first time, you'll be treated to a rare treat from what is usually an underwhelming feature of the PlayStation2 hardware.

Retro Feature

RESIDENT GENIUS



ROCK-HARD ARCADE PLATFORMERS, GENRE-DEFINING FIGHTERS, MUCH-LOVED SHOOTERS, BANG UP TO DATE CURRENT-GEN MASTERPIECES, AND MUCH MORE IN BETWEEN. JOIN US FOR A BRIEF HISTORY OF A COMPANY THAT EVEN YOUR OLD NAN PROBABLY HAS A SOFT SPOT FOR





1979 – a monumental year. Thatcher rose to power in the UK. Yours truly entered this world to fulfil a journalistic destiny. And the Village People were sued by the YMCA. In the UK, we had a smattering of *Asteroids* machines but were in the grip of too many social and political problems to worry about playing games.

Over in Japan, however, the exciting, futuristic possibilities of video gaming were starting to become apparent, and many companies were taking advantage of the impending boom by switching attentions to the distribution and manufacture of amusement machines. One such firm was Matsubara based I.R.M Corporation, which was established in this very year with a relatively modest 10 million yen capital. Its aim was to develop and sell "electric applied game machines". In 1981 the subsidiary JAPAN CAPSULE COMPUTER Co. Ltd were born, and the corporate name of the company was changed to SANBI Co.Ltd in 1983, when it upped sticks to Habikino, Osaka. 1983 saw the birth of the "old" Capcom Ltd, which was set up in Hirano, Osaka (with a further ten million yen), for the purpose of selling software. A Tokyo branch was established in 1983, as the company released its first coin-operated games, and opened its first dedicated amusement arcade centre. The first games produced by the company were simple, non-videogame fare, owing more to pachinko and fruit machines than *Space Invaders*. That said, the success of titles such as *Fever Chance* and *Little League* gave the company some momentum and in 1984 it created its first videogame.



▲ Choosing the order in which you fight bosses is key.

Although Capcom was ostensibly a fairly large, money making business from the get-go, it is fair to say that the tiny acorn/giant oak analogy rings true when you have a look at its debut release, Vulgus, some 22 years on. Created with the assistance of rival SNK, who were already five-year veterans in the biz, it was and still is





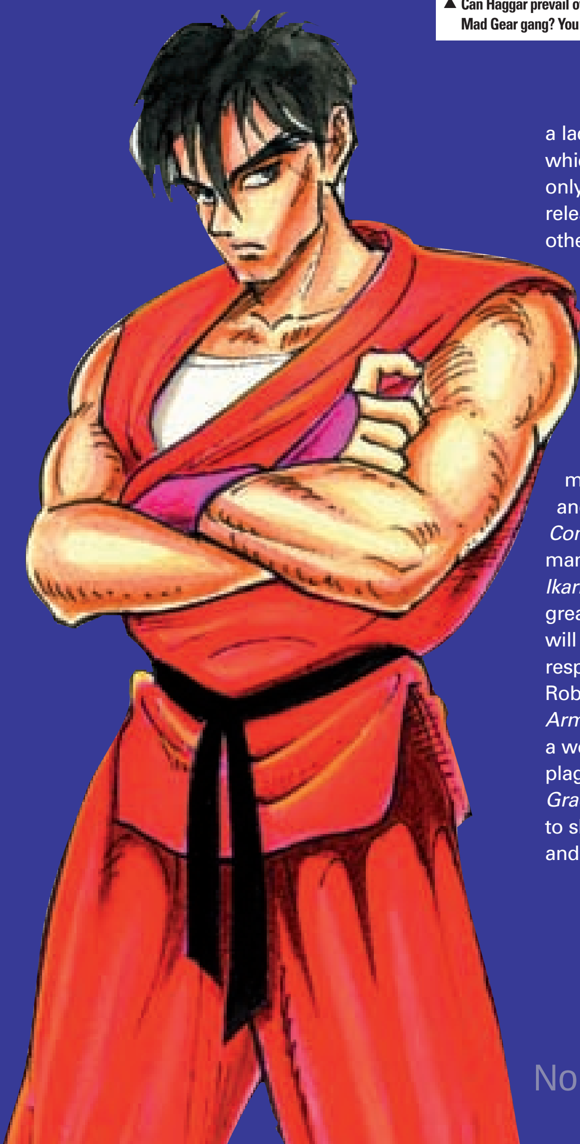






▲ Can Haggar prevail over the Mad Gear gang? You decide.





a lacklustre vertical shooter which paled in comparison not only to corresponding SNK releases of the time but also to other Capcom releases of the same period, in particular the cracking, World War II themed *1942*, which still plays beautifully, if frustratingly, to this very day. The next three years saw Capcom step up a few gears, producing many more titles of varying quality and importance. The likeable *Commando* went on to influence many similar games, such as *Ikari Warriors*, and received great home conversions. Many will remember the C64 version, resplendent with an incredible Rob Hubbard soundtrack. *Side Arms – Hyper Dyne* contained a weapon selection system plagiarised from Konami's *Gradius*, but allowed the player to shoot in multiple directions, and furthered the interesting 'Jet Pack Hero' trilogy, which began with *Section Z* and would culminate with *Forgotten Worlds*. *Ghosts & Goblins* also made its first appearance in 1985, a stunning platformer with truly memorable character design and gameplay, which would go on to spawn two sequels and some worthy spin-offs.

There were various types of arcade hardware utilised during Capcom's early forays into the arcade market. Interestingly, two of its early boards were named after its own titles – namely the Section Z (which was used to power *Avengers*, *Legendary Wings* and, erm, *Section Z*) and the Commando, which was home to *Black Tiger* and *Commando*, amongst others.

As Capcom got better and better at coming up with the goods in the arcade, its games were licensed out for home conversions due to their immense popularity.

The developer also noticed that Nintendo had made some big strides in the marketplace with its Nintendo Entertainment System/Family Computer, and entered into a business relationship with it that still holds up to this day. This meant plenty of cartridge-based goodness for owners of the 8-bit console, as it received many Capcom arcade conversions over the years, as well as some tasty exclusives. Capcom kicked things off with a conversion of *1942*, which was its first home videogame release way back in 1985. *Ghosts & Goblins* and *Commando* soon followed, and all sold remarkably well.

NES-only titles ranged from an eminently more playable re-imagining of *Bionic Commando* (it was prohibitively difficult in the arcades), to Disney-licensed platformers, survival horror pre-cursor, *Sweet Home*, and the charming, super-deformed *Mighty Final Fight*. Of course, numerous Capcom NES cartridges were also converted to Nintendo's Playchoice 10 arcade system, which charged arcade





◀ How things have changed since *Fighting Street*.



▶ Ryu, Ken and Sagat remained, but everything else was an evolution.

goers by the minute to sample various Nintendo Entertainment System titles. As extortionate as this practise was, it still brings back fond memories of what it was like to go to an arcade as a kid, and remains infinitely better value than the £2 per play fare encountered in this day and age.

The NES was also the platform upon which we first experienced *Mega Man/Rockman*, who made his debut in 1987. A playable, polished platformer, the little blue fella enjoyed five NES sequels, and has appeared in well over thirty games since, on a number of different consoles. Now considered Capcom's mascot, Mega Man is the third largest grossing franchise in the history of the company (after Resident Evil and Street Fighter), having shifted more than 18million units since his first appearance. 2006 saw the release of *Mega Man – Powered Up* for the PSP, which is a remake of the first game, and arrived to very positive reviews.





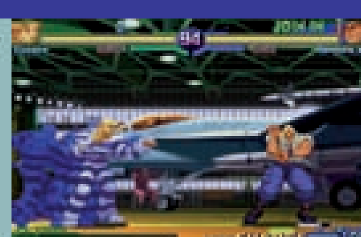


As the arcade industry boomed, Capcom flourished, seemingly becoming stronger by each passing year. An American office had long since been established to distribute its products in the States, as popular arcade classics literally rolled off the production line. The Capcom Play System 1 (CPS1) arcade motherboard was developed, and contained a Motorola 68000 microprocessor at its core. The increased power and specifications of the board meant that games looked and sounded great, however the hardware also drew parallels with home consoles meaning that it was relatively easy to convert CPS1 titles across to the home. This was proven beyond any doubt by the stunning Megadrive conversions of *Strider*, *Mercs* and *Ghouls & Ghosts*.

There were many exceptional titles released on CPS1 hardware in the ensuing years. Kicking off with the aforementioned *Forgotten Worlds* and ending somewhat disappointingly with *Megaman: The Power Battle*, the board was a success and home to 29 titles. Highlights included the aforementioned *Strider* and *Ghouls & Ghosts*, which set platform-action benchmarks that still stand up extraordinarily well to this day. Other titles, like the three-games-in-one *Three Wonders* and superior film tie-in *Willow*, squeezed graphical miracles from the chipset, and look lovely even when placed up against latter day titles on formats such as the Game Boy Advance and DS. Aside from the titles that were appearing in the arcades and on Nintendo and SEGA's formats, US Gold and Elite Systems were also busy translating practically all of the company's arcade games across to the Commodore 64 and ZX Spectrum. In fact, for many gamers this was the first opportunity they had to sample the majority of Capcom's creations – a lot of people remember *Ghosts 'N Goblins* as a Spectrum game, even though the arcade version was infinitely superior in terms of visuals.

There were two CPS1 games, however, that were to prove





▲ The *Alpha* series represented a dramatic aesthetic shift for *SF*.

immensely, unbelievably popular, and not without good reason.

You would never have guessed this to be the case in hindsight, particularly when you think back to the 1987 release of *Street Fighter*, a one-on-one fighting game created by company golden boy Yoshiki Okamoto. Okamoto had been jettisoned by Konami after helping to create classics *Time Pilot* and *Gyruss*. He joined Capcom in 1984, where he caused an instant upturn in fortunes by creating *1942* – easily Capcom's first decent game. *Street Fighter* was no more innovative or impressive than other one-on-one fighters that had preceded it, such as *Karate Champ* or *Yie Ar Kung Fu*. What it did have was large, bold sprites, interesting characters and special moves, which were performed by inputting certain commands on the joystick before pressing one of the numerous attack buttons.

Some versions of the arcade cabinet featured pressure sensitive buttons, with the on-screen character responding accordingly depending on how hard you mashed the pads. This air-pressure technology may have seemed exciting, but the game played frustratingly with commands exceedingly difficult to input.

Although it played like an absolute dog, there was enough there to impress the public and indeed Capcom staff to get cracking on a sequel. Using the power of the CPS1 board, Okamoto unleashed *Final Fight* in 1989. Upon announcement in Japan it was originally known as *Final Fight: Street Fighter '89* – a scrolling fighter in the *Double Dragon* mould that was set within the same universe as the *Street Fighter* coin op. This working title was later streamlined to the simple *Final Fight* moniker, and was released to universal acclaim for its balanced gameplay, superb graphics and coin-chomping addictiveness. Loosely based upon Walter Hill's cult 1984 movie *Streets of Fire*, and featuring numerous references to pop culture (including the Andore character, clearly based upon famous WWF wrestler, Andre The Giant), *Final Fight* is a cast in stone classic that still looks and plays well today. It was also the first of many similar scrolling fighters produced by the company over the years, which included many fondly remembered titles such as Okamoto's own *Captain Commando*, *Aliens Vs Predator*, and the *Tenchi Wu Kurau* series, which brought kick-ass fighting action married to a historical, *Romance Of The Three Kingdoms* setting. The Capcom scrolling fighters are characterised by large, brightly coloured sprites and detailed backdrops, with numerous collectable power-ups and weapons, energy bars for both the playable characters and NPCs, and a succession of tough-as-nails bosses, that invariably end up returning during the last stage for a "boss rush" section. Later variations on the theme, such as the staggeringly playable *Dungeons & Dragons: Shadow Over Mystara*, introduced RPG-style elements to the gameplay, with players able to level up during the course of the game, and numerous selectable routes on offer through the levels. It is interesting to note that in creating what is effectively a recognised genre of games, Okamoto had previously had a hand in the development of the inferior Technos fighter, *Double Dragon II* – upon which he acted as co-producer.

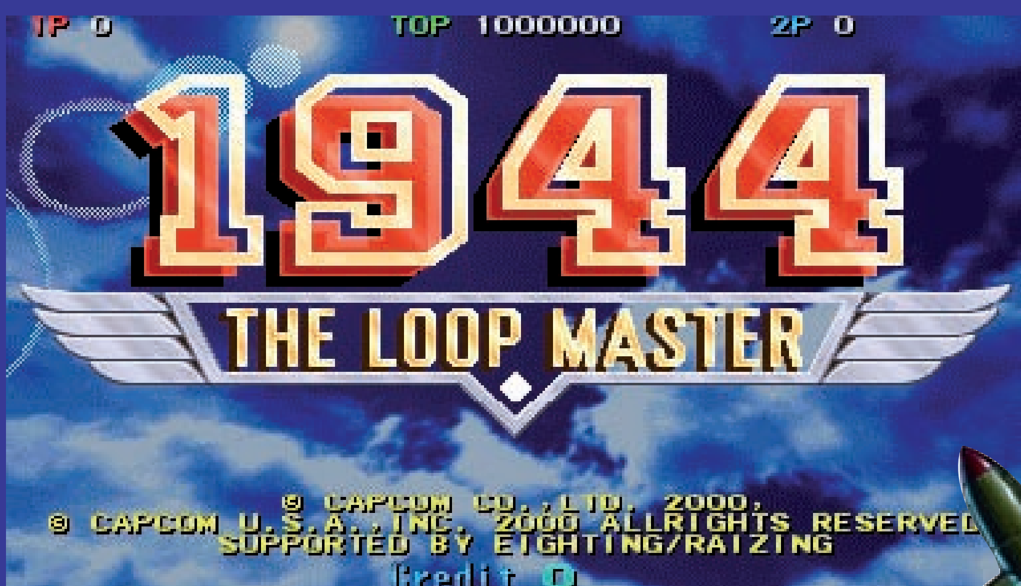
Despite the success of *Final Fight* in the arcades, and on the numerous home formats to which it was ported, it was still not the true sequel to *Street Fighter* that Okamoto was looking for. That was to come two years later. In the meantime, the old Capcom Co.Ltd had merged with SANBI Co.Ltd to form the Capcom we know and love to this day.

It is hard to comprehend how much of an impact *Street*

ALLIED FORCES

Capcom may be famous for its own legendary 'series', but few people realise that its has collaborated with other companies on more than one occasion, even acting as publisher to other developers when releasing games in other territories. Capcom collaborated with shmup kings Raizing when creating vertical blasters *1944: The Loop Master* and *Dimahoo*, and were also partly responsible for Cave's only ever crack at a horizontal shooter, the magnificent *Progear No Arashi*, which surfaced on CPS2 hardware. No one will forget the long awaited meetings between Capcom and SNK's fighting universes, with the *Capcom vs SNK* and *SVC Chaos* titles. Fans who had grown up with SNK and Capcom fighting games will remember the earth-shattering announcement of these collaborations, which at the time would have been the equivalent of EastEnders merging with Corrie. Capcom continue to work with other developers, most notably Nintendo, with whom it helped create a number of Zelda titles, and Namco; the two giants knocking heads in Japan-only tactical RPG *Namco X Capcom*. Interestingly, Capcom also publish the *GTA* series in Japan.





▲ Classic WWII shmup action, courtesy of *1944*.









▼ *Strider 1* and *2* were excellent. Just ignore the MD sequel!

Fighter II had upon the world of videogaming. It is also difficult to imagine Capcom having had half of the success it had done without the classic 2D scrapper. To put things in perspective, the game made more money in the arcades than *Jurassic Park* did in movie theatres. That is a hell of an achievement. Okamoto had taken the bare bones of the poor arcade original – i.e the idea of a fighting tournament staged in various locations around the world, the special moves, and the numerous characters – and given them a dose of CPS1-flavoured steroids. What turned up was a masterpiece of design and playability that is still widely regarded as one of the greatest and most influential games of that or any era.

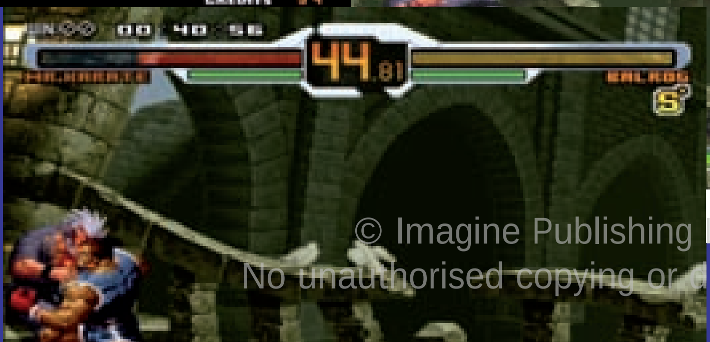
1991 had seen other fighting games enter the fray, most notably SNK's *Fatal Fury*. But the sheer vibrancy and clarity of the character design and animation resulted in *SFII* being the clear favourite amongst beat-'em-up fans. The game offered the player a choice of eight characters in total, each offering their own fighting style and list of special moves and abilities. But by far the most popular feature was the combo, which had apparently come about by complete accident during development. This basically gave skilled players the opportunity to link moves together, which looked impressive and simultaneously increased the amount of damage delivered in an unblockable string of events. Even though *Street Fighter II* was undeniably popular, there were one or two slight gripes that players had, mostly regarding the power balance between the various fighters and the fact that the four boss characters were not selectable. Of course it was inevitable that Capcom would develop a follow-up, but rather than starting from scratch on a true sequel, the company merely reworked the original game, adjusting the slight imbalances and introducing the bosses as playable characters. Launching in April '92, *Street Fighter II: Dash*, or *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition* as it's known in the UK, proved to be just as popular as its predecessor.

But *Champion Edition* wasn't Capcom's only *Street Fighter* success story that year. The Super Nintendo had launched in Japan 18 months previously and although the technology lacked the graphical processing power of the CPS1 arcade board, it was more than capable of producing a notable conversion of *SFII*. Interestingly, Capcom chose not to translate the newer *Champion Edition*, instead sticking with the standard *World Warrior* version for its initial console release. At the time there were rumours of a button-press cheat that allowed you to play as the bosses, but aside from a glitchy Game Genie code, it soon became clear that such a thing simply wasn't included. This didn't stop people from buying Super Nintendo consoles in their droves, enticed by near-arcade perfect conversions of not only *Street Fighter II* but also *Final Fight*.

Super Nintendo owners would eventually get the opportunity to play as the infamous four fighters. Continuing to build on the success of the first two games, Capcom released a third arcade instalment in the *SFII*









▼ Capcom and SNK together? It's the ultimate combination.



▼ Frenetic brawling at its finest; a fantaastic multiplayer game.





"TO PUT THINGS INTO PERSPECTIVE, STREET FIGHTER II MADE MORE MONEY THAN JURASSIC PARK DID IN THE MOVIE THEATRES"

series in time for Christmas 1992, then on the SNES the following summer. Again merely a tweaked version of the original game, *Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting* proved to be the most popular edition with the fans. With a far larger selection of special moves on offer, speeded-up gameplay and a fresh lick of paint, *Turbo* immediately eclipsed its predecessors. What was particularly interesting was how many of the new moves seemed to be based on those seen in bootlegged *Street Fighter* titles that had appeared earlier in 1992, such as *Rainbow Edition* and *Black Belt*. The CPS1 board was notoriously easy to bootleg, and play around with, and as a result it was not uncommon to see various bizarre incarnations of the *SFII* titles on display in your local dodgy arcade/fairground/greasy spoon (delete as appropriate).



As incredible as the *Street Fighter* phenomenon may have seemed at the time, there was a certain sadness to the mega success, as many CPS1 arcade boards were "cannibalised" in order to satiate the demand for more *Street Fighter 2* boards. This is one of the reasons why titles like *The Punisher* and *Area 88* often command high prices in today's market.

Still – the demand for more *Street Fighter II* continued. In 1993 Capcom's grasp of the arcade market tightened further with the release of the Capcom Play System 2 (CPS2) board. Consisting of an "A" and a "B" board, the new technology worked in a similar fashion to home consoles. The "A" boards contained the JAMMA connections and all of the necessary hardware required to get the games up and running, whilst the "B" boards were the actual games themselves. The two boards slot together but are colour coded by region, meaning that much the same way as cartridge region lockout on a games console, only the corresponding "A" and "B" boards of the same region will work together. The CPS2 board gave greatly increased power both in terms of graphics and sound, and debuted in 1993 with *Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers*. With *SFII Turbo* taking the original 12 fighters about as far as they could go, 1993 saw Capcom redraw many of *Street Fighter's* character animations, up the resolution of the game and introduce a further four characters.

Super Street Fighter II was as playable as any other 2D fighter of the time, yet suffered from a severe lack of pace, and suspect, tinny sounding character voices. The latter may seem trivial, however for those used to having their eardrums battered by the constant "ha-do-ken" noises that permeated the early 90s arcade, it was a perfectly understandable criticism. Not wishing to upset its adoring public, Capcom was straight back into the development kitchen and returned a mere six months later with *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* – complete with adjustable speed settings, grittier colours and Super Moves. At the bottom of the screen each character had a bar that gradually filled up with every move that connected and every special move performed. Once full a brand new 'Super Move' became available – usually an extended version of one of the standard special moves. Once again SNES and Mega Drive versions were released though, as before, Capcom went with the standard version of the game, rather than the souped-up *Turbo* version.

By mid-1994 it was clear that things were starting to move on – polygons were slowly but surely taking over and the *Street Fighter* formula was starting to become a little tired. Nevertheless, Capcom continued to produce 2D fighting games and in 1994 it introduced a new graphical style, along with the ability to block moves in the air. *Darkstalkers/Vampire: The Night Warriors* featured similar gameplay to *SFII*, though the characters were more Manga-like and the overall feel was bright, vibrant, and cartoon-like. *Darkstalkers* featured characters and a storyline loosely based around horror films and literature, as well as traditional folklore. Sexy succubus Morrigan became the series' icon much in the same way as Ryu and Ken are traditionally associated with *Street Fighter*, whilst other characters such as Demitri and Anakaris have become cult favourites to long-standing fans. *Vampire/Darkstalkers* received a superb initial conversion to the Sony PlayStation, and has since spawned five further sequels or associated titles, the most recent of which has appeared on the PlayStation Portable.

Capcom took the popular new Manga look and worked it back into *Street Fighter*, resulting in

"IT WOULD CERTAINLY APPEAR THAT CAPCOM HAS NOT LOST ITS POWER TO ENTHRAL AND CAPTIVATE GAMERS… LONG MAY THIS CONTINUE"

Street Fighter Zero/Alpha. This prequel was set years before the original game and gave gamers the opportunity to play as characters only ever spoken of in *SFII's* background stories, such as Guile's friend Charlie. By 1996 the arcade industry was starting to show signs of collapse and although Capcom had already made alternative plans in the form of *Resident Evil*, it wasn't ready to bury the one-on-one beat-'em-up just yet. As well as two follow-ups to *Street Fighter Alpha*, it was also over this period that the company once again teamed up with Marvel Comics, as it had when it created *X-Men: Children Of The Atom* in 1994 and *Marvel Super Heroes* in 1995. Introducing yet another twist on the *SFII* theme, *X-Men Vs. Street Fighter*, *Marvel Super Heroes Vs. Street Fighter,* and many other titles in the 'Vs.' range allowed the player to chose two fighters that could be switched between at any time during a fight. Although SNK had developed team combat some time earlier with the *King Of Fighters* series, this was the first time that characters could be changed over in real time. Thanks to the availability of a 4MB RAM cartridge, Capcom was able to port each of these memory-intensive games across to the Sega Saturn in near perfect form, while the PSone conversions nearly always needed to be cut down. A prime example of this was *X-Men vs Street Fighter*, which turned up on the PSone sans-the tag system, rendering the game pretty much unrecognisable to its arcade counterpart.

It wasn't just about the fighters, however. Nor was Capcom's success limited to the arcades during the early 90s. The über-popular Mega Drive, Super Nintendo and Game Boy consoles were equally as well supported in the early part of that decade as the NES had been a few years previously. In addition to *Street Fighter II* and *Final Fight* (both of which appeared on the SNES and Megadrive, albeit the Mega CD for the latter), Capcom produced a number of other exclusive titles and arcade conversions, which are still spoken of in hushed tones more than ten years on. *Mercs* arrived on the Megadrive with an additional, RPG style mode, which effectively gave the player two games for the price of one. The ubiquitous Megaman received his own Sega-exclusive adventure in the form of *Megaman: The Wily Wars*, whilst Capcom's working relationship with Disney spawned some neat platformers, in particular the spellbinding *Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse*. SNES-heads enjoyed the grade-A RPG platformer *Demon's Blazon/Demon's Crest*, which took loveable red demon Red Arrimer/Arimaa from the *Ghosts & Goblins* series and placed him in his very own game, which drew some magnificent reviews at the time. The 16-bit Ninty was also the only place to be for a home version of horizontal shooter *Area 88*, as well as some excellent RPG action in the form of *Breath of Fire*. Game Boy owners were hardly short changed, either. They could enjoy perfect handheld conversions of several Megaman titles, as well as *Bionic Commando*, and *Demon's Blazon* prequel *Gargoyle's Quest*.

The CPS2 hardware allowed some blinding updates of non-fighting franchises and superlative original creations. *Eco Fighters* was a brilliant cute-'em-up, which borrowed the lovable anime stylings of *Parodius* and *Twinbee* and married them to a sophisticated, *Forgotten Worlds*-style control system. The hilariously named *Super Puzzle Fighter 2 Turbo* introduced super-deformed characters from the *Street Fighter* universe to a good 'ol game of *Puyo Puyo*, to terrific effect, whilst *1944: The Loop Master* and *Dimahoo* were joint projects between Capcom and Raizing that showed an absolute proficiency in creating "bullet hell" style shooters.

As 2D gaming began to wane, Capcom forged new working relationships with other companies in an effort to keep up in the arcade race. Using Sony's PlayStation-based ZN-1 hardware, Capcom tried its hand at some 3D-style fighters, to mixed reactions. Long time fans did not appreciate the move from 2D to pseudo-3D evident in average games like *Star Gladiator* and *Street Fighter EX*, released in 1996. Although playable, the games were overly simplistic and paled in comparison to rival productions such as Namco's *Tekken* and *Soul Edge*. 1997 saw a move to Sony's slightly more refined ZN-2 board, leading to some infinitely more successful efforts, such as *Rival Schools* and the brilliant *Strider 2*, both of which received arcade perfect conversions to the PlayStation between '97 and '99. Later on, Capcom utilised Sega's ST-V motherboard to



▼ The Japanese *Biohazard* remained fully uncensored.





▼ Capcom again proves it's the master of scrolling brawlers.

produce the atrocious *Final Fight Revenge*, and worked with Sega to produce a number of titles for their Naomi hardware, in particular the excellent *Capcom Vs SNK* series and its first "true" 3D fighting game, *Power Stone*. All but one or two of the Capcom titles released on Naomi hardware received near-flawless conversions to the Sega Dreamcast console.

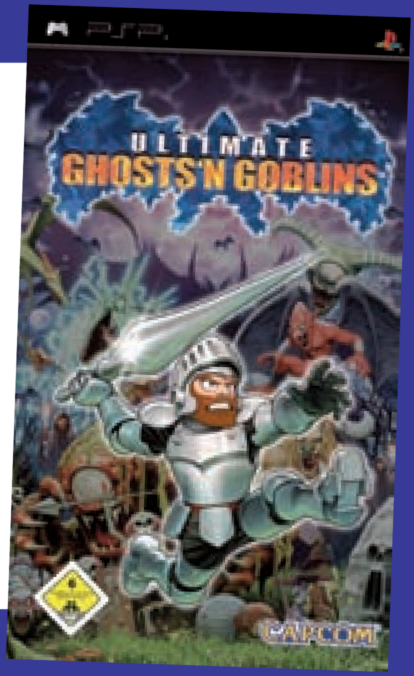
The ultimate evolution of Capcom's own arcade hardware was its CPSIII board, released in 1996. It was and still is an incredibly powerful piece of equipment for forging 2D games, capable of superb animation and crisp, detailed backdrops. Unfortunately, there were only ever six titles released for what was to become the last Capcom arcade system. First up was disappointing fighter *Red Earth/Warzard*, which featured a paltry four playable characters, and was never released on any home console. This was followed by the much-vaunted *Street Fighter III* in 1997, which was eventually succeeded by two sequels, *Second Impact: Giant Attack* (1998) and *Third Strike: Fight For The Future* (1999). All three games look beautiful, with incredible detail and animation on display. Although not deviating much from the previous *Street Fighter* titles, the three CPS3 outings have a massive following, in spite of some uninspiring characters and the inclusion of Ryu and Ken, left in perhaps because Capcom was worried about the bankability of a *Street Fighter* title without it's dual figureheads. With a sophisticated parrying system and all-round gloss, *3rd Strike* is now a popular choice for online and tournament play, thanks to Xbox and PS2 versions. Apart from three disappointing *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure* anime tie-in fighters, the six games were all Capcom had to for it's investment in CPSIII hardware. Understandably, it decided to takle a leave of absence from producing it's own arcade technology from 1999 onwards.

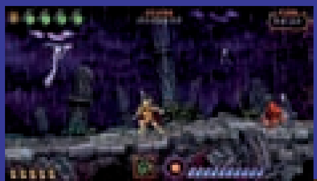
Meanwhile, back on home consoles, Capcom had been busy laying the foundations for becoming the mega-successful producer of home entertainment fare we know and love to this day. *Biohazard* was released in 1996 too much critical acclaim. Based loosely on the early NES horror title *Sweet Home*, and much more obviously on the gorefest likes of George A.Romero films, it is widely recognised as being the game that kick-started the Survival Horror genre so beloved by today's gamers. Due to a threat of legal action from porn star-fronted agit-rap-rockers Biohazard, the game was renamed *Resident Evil* in the West, and went on to sell millions of copies on just about every conceivable format known to man. An atmospheric romp through some frankly terrifying situations, *Resident Evil* has received sequels by the dozen, as well as more than one remake of the original game. The latest original game in the series, *Resident Evil 4/Biohazard 4*, was rightly named among the best of 2005, with many proclaiming it among the best of all time. Retro gamers will always have a special place in their hearts for the original, and it is great to see it receiving the update treatment in the form of *Resident Evil: Deadly Silence* on the DS.

Capcom's position as 'AAA' console developers was cemented further with Resi-with-reptiles shocker *Dino Crisis*, which whilst a decent scare-fest in it's own right, did not inspire with its sequels. Megaman continued to appear on the PSone and Saturn, whilst RPG fans were appeased this quality, old-school-style sequels to the *Breath Of Fire* series. It wasn't until the advent of the PlayStation 2, however, that Capcom really kicked on once again. Masters of the slightly creepy and macabre, their dark side was repeatedly brought to the fore with superb swords 'n' guns actioner *Devil May Cry*, *Resident Evil*-esque samurai slash-fest *Onimusha*, and the kooky soul-collecting romp based on the cartoon *Gregory Horror Show*. With at least one brilliant *Devil May Cry* sequel, mind boggling schizoid shooter *Killer7*, and knowing nods to its arcade past with *Viewtiful Joe* and *PN03*, it would appear that Capcom has not lost its power to enthral and captivate gamers. In fact, we'd go as far as to wager that a good 50% of gamers have fallen in love with a Capcom game in their lifetime. Long may this continue.

RISE FROM THE GRAVE

We all love our retro gaming, and Capcom have historically been very generous, not only in providing retro compilations of excellent quality (see 1998's Capcom Generations, as well as the recent Classics and Megaman collection releases for current gen consoles), but also by making some super remakes or re-workings of beloved franchises. Resident Evil is the most obvious candidate; with the pant-soiling GameCube remake helping a whole new generation of gamers fall in love with the title. Let us not forget the Ghosts & Goblins esque qualities of the underrated Maximo, the many Game Boy Advance ports of titles such as Super Ghouls & Ghosts and Breath Of Fire, and the mouth watering Extreme Ghosts & Goblins, which is just around the corner on the PSP. It is a testament to the retro lovin' shown by the folks at Capcom that Retro Gamer regularly features several "forthcoming" Capcom releases of an old-school bent, something that we hope continues to be the a case.







▼ *UGnG* has proven to be a faithful update to a classic.


HANNAH . D
HOGG
JACK .
HOGG



Taxi for a Mr T Rex… **Cadillacs And Dinosaurs, Arcade (Capcom), 1992**

He likes to score…

An interview with… WALTER DAY OF TWIN GALAXIES

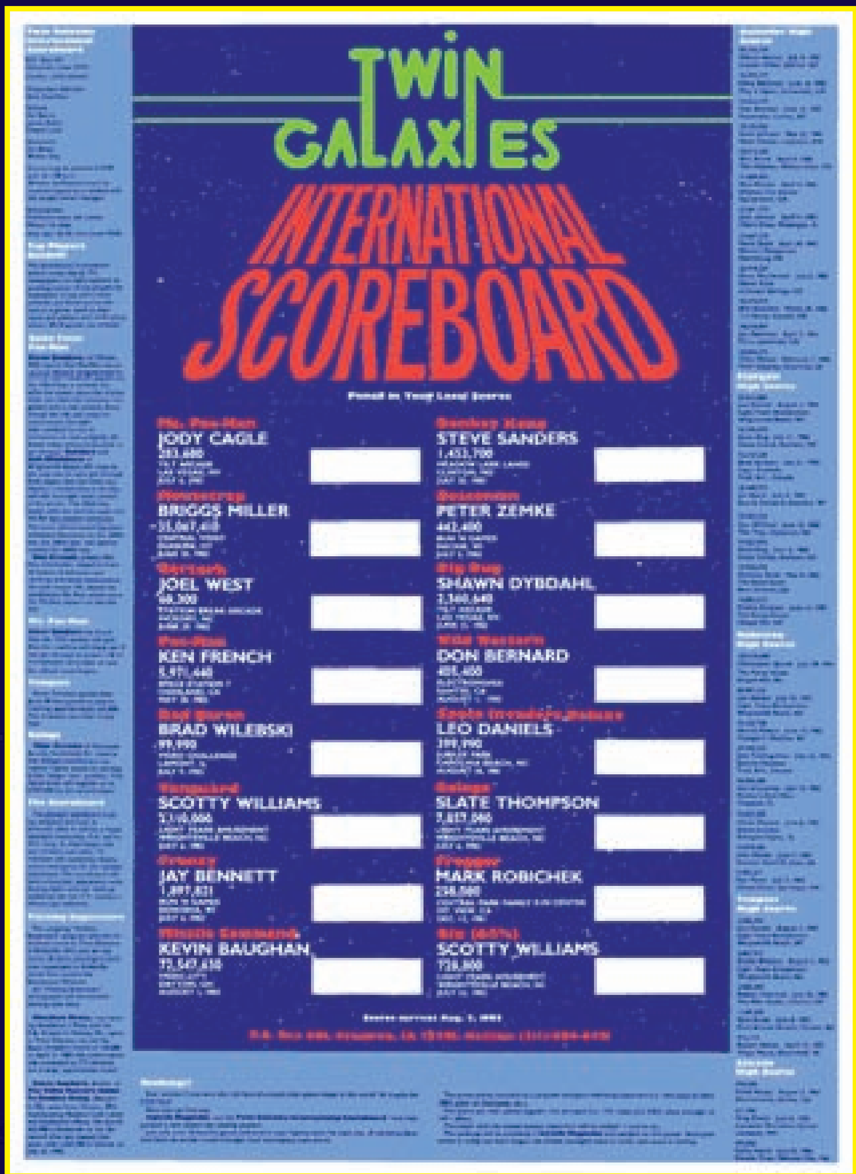
THINK YOU'RE GOOD AT GAMES? YOU'RE NOTHING UNTIL YOU'VE MADE IT ONTO THE TWIN GALAXIES HIGH-SCORE BOARD. MEET THE MAN WHO GOT THE WHOLE THING STARTED…

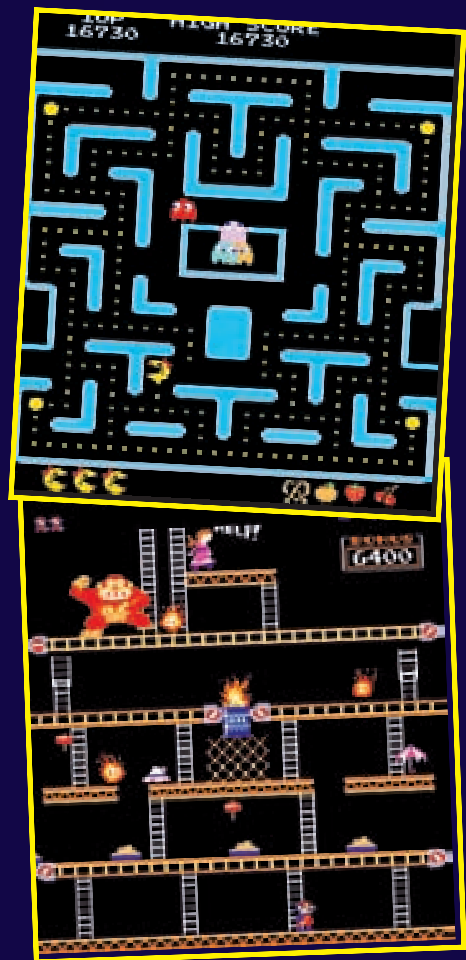


▲ Walter Day: the Norris McWhirter of the gaming world, except he wears a cool referee's shirt – just so you know what it is he does…

Many years ago, Walter Day had a vision. In 1981 the 32-year-old travelling salesman journeyed through 15 US states and visited over 100 arcades in order to collate as many arcade high scores as possible. By the end of the year he had opened his own arcade, Twin Galaxies, and the collated scores were made public as the Twin Galaxies National Scoreboard.

Although the actual arcade has long since disappeared, Twin Galaxies itself lives on and it's now recognised as the official referee for videogame high scores. No matter what your score on ***Galaxian*** or ***Pac-Man*** is, it won't matter one bit until it's nestling snugly on the Twin Galaxies leaderboard. After UK gamer Gary Whelan recently beat the ***Galaxian*** world record, we thought it was about time that we had a chat with Day and found out more about his lifelong passion.





▲ Some classic titles have high scores that haven't been beaten for over 20 years, and it's not just arcade games that are record-breaking.

The interview

Retro: How did you first get interested in computer games?

Walter Day: I first became addicted when I discovered ***Space Invaders*** in May 1980. I just couldn't stop playing it. Then, in early 1981, I started playing ***Pac-Man***. Eventually, I opened Twin Galaxies as an excuse to play more videogames without actually feeling guilty about it.

R: What sort of games did Twin Galaxies house and did you keep any of them?

WD: Twin Galaxies opened on 10 November, 1981 with 22 games and included all the usual suspects such as ***Pac-Man***, ***Donkey Kong***, ***Tempest***, ***Centipede*** and ***Frogger***. When we opened the cash boxes for the first time, the ***Frogger*** game had earned $420 and the ***Berzerk*** game $410 – it was the 'golden age' of the videogame arcade and I loved every minute of it. Twin Galaxies eventually closed on 6 March, 1984. Sadly, I don't actually have any of the machines now; I just exist in an office in order to run the scoreboard.

R: How popular was Twin Galaxies when it was first formed?

WD: **Very popular – at one stage, it was the centre of the gaming universe. Players would come from many different countries and we'd get over 100 phone calls a day, quite often including calls from up to eight different countries each day.**

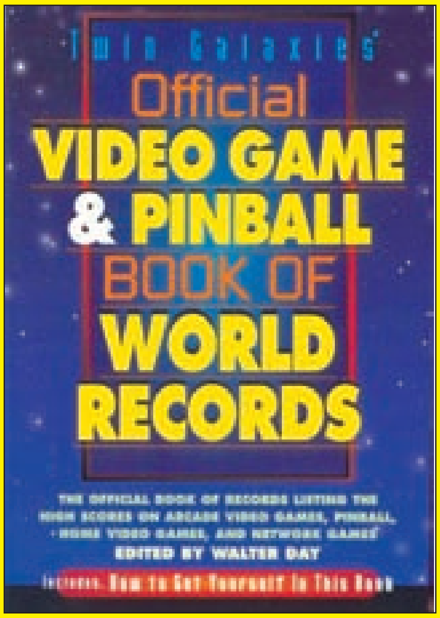
R: What sort of media coverage did Twin Galaxies use to receive?

WD: It was very extensive at one stage. During the period 1982-1985, we were appearing on the news almost every other day. ***Life*** magazine, Marvel Comics, ***USA Today***, ***Washington Post***, ***Philadelphia Inquirer*** and ABC-TV's ***That's Incredible*** show are just a few of the magazines and TV shows that Twin Galaxies appeared on.

R: What possessed you to travel over 10,000 miles in order to collate all the arcade high scores you wanted? How expensive was it and what did your family think about it?

WD: Fortunately, I was single at the time, so my wife wasn't a consideration. Today, my girlfriend doesn't really know what to make of it. You have to realise, though, that back in 1981 I was in love with videogames and was able to turn my business trips into tours of all the local arcades. I was looking for the greatest champions of the era – which is what Twin Galaxies is still about – as I wanted to honour the greatest players and crown them as the royalty of the 'videogame age'. Sure it cost a hell of a lot to travel... but I'd do it again today without a second thought.

He likes to score...



THE BIG BOOK OF RECORDS

Another aspect of Twin Galaxies is Day's *Twin Galaxies' Official Video Game & Pinball Book of World Records*. It's a great read, it's filled with a ridiculous amount of high scores and contains plenty of interesting and highly amusing anecdotes.

Although Day is still hard at work putting the finishing touches to an all-new three volume set, the original edition is still available to purchase from Twin Galaxies' website. The $30 asking price may sound a little steep, but if you've any interest at all in high scores and retrogaming, you'll find it an essential purchase.

R: Did any arcade owners have any problems with you taking down scores?
WD: Well, there was one time an arcade felt worried that I was checking them out with plans to open a rival arcade in their small town of Trenton, Missouri. Without warning, they shut off all the electricity and asked me to leave. On another occasion, I was surrounded by a group of people who wanted to know why I was counting all their games – after I told them they threw me out.

R: Were there any patterns to the high scores you came across?
WD: To be honest, the great players were widely dispersed throughout the US. There does seem to be this illusion that the top players congregated in California, North Carolina and Florida, but this was simply because of the high concentrations of population in such areas. Videogame champions popped up anywhere and everywhere.

R: What sort of ages are the record holders? Are they mostly youngsters, or are there a few older record holders out there?
WD: Videogame players are usually in their twenties to thirties. In my experience, younger players can't actually hold their own against older players because of a lack of motor or mental development. I'm not trying to be controversial, it's simply a general rule that has held up now for over 25 years. There are always exceptions, of course. Usually, the older and younger players don't play the same games, so it's sometimes hard to always accurately compare them.

R: What sort of support do you receive from the industry? Are you ever loaned machines, or given any for prizes?
WD: Support has always been very good. Atari, Williams, Midway, Taito, Universal, Stern, Nintendo, Exidy and Sega initially supported the scoreboard. Midway sent us our first high score referral on 8 February, 1982. During the summer of 1983, Sega loaned us copies of ***Star Trek***, ***Championship Baseball***, ***Congo Bongo*** and ***Buck Rogers*** for long-term use, while Williams loaned us multiple machines of ***Bubbles***, ***Moon Patrol***, ***Sinistar***, ***Motorace USA*** and ***Robotron***. Finally, Exidy sent us two copies of ***Crossbow*** to use extensively. Manufacturers paid for many contest prizes and expenses in the 1983-1985 era – that's when we received the most support.

R: What types of games tend to work best for high score challenges?
WD: Over 90 per cent of games created so far have a high-score modality and Twin Galaxies exists to monitor all these scores long after even the manufacturers have abandoned them. Twin Galaxies is the historical repository of the history of gaming. Long after a manufacturer has gone out of business, we will still be there continuing to support their games and monitor the world records on these now orphaned titles.

R: What are the more popular titles that people try to beat records on?
WD: It runs the gamut now, although the older systems are once again regaining popularity: NES, Colecovision and Atari 2600 are all being logged at the moment, and we're also busy verifying scores for the PS2, Xbox, GameCube, Nintendo DS and PSP.

R: Why do you think Twin Galaxies has become so popular over the years?
WD: I think it's because it fills the needs of the time. Videogaming will be the biggest sport in the world someday, and Twin Galaxies plays a humble role as the official statistical historian for the hobby while it's in these first formative years. The database of statistics we are maintaining is the historical database that future generations of players will consider the official records generated by the industry during its infancy.

R: When did your collaboration with the *Guinness Book Of Records* begin?
WD: It started off in the early Eighties and we were very close. For some years I retired and, during my absence, the relationship with Guinness eventually dissolved. Now, though, we are once again very close with Guinness and are currently working on several projects together.

R: Are you still running regular competitions in the US, and are there any plans to bring any Twin Galaxies events to the UK or Europe?
WD: Yes, we plan many contests but I've been avoiding them right now because I'm focusing all my attention on the forthcoming book of records. It will be a three-volume set covering the history of gaming in addition to the high scores and contest results. We plan on bringing major events to the UK as soon as we get sponsors.

R: Gary Whelan became a bit of a gaming celebrity in the UK when he broke the *Galaxian* high-score record. What's the oldest unbeaten record you have and has anyone come close to beating it?
WD: ***Asteroids*** has been held by Scott Safran since 13 November, 1982 while ***Gorf*** has been held by Todd Rogers since 24 November, 1982. Of course, there are many other titles, but these are the most prominent.

R: Got any unusual high-score stories?
WD: Well, the oldest man to be world champion on a legacy game – a game that has a long history

"SOMETIMES WE WATCH A GAME A FRAME AT A TIME TO MAKE SURE THERE'S NO CHEATING"

with many challengers – was John Lawton of Weirs Beach. At the age of 72 he won the ***Depth Charge*** title with 4,420 points. That was on 3 June, 2003 and he's still unbeaten.

R: How many scores are submitted each month?

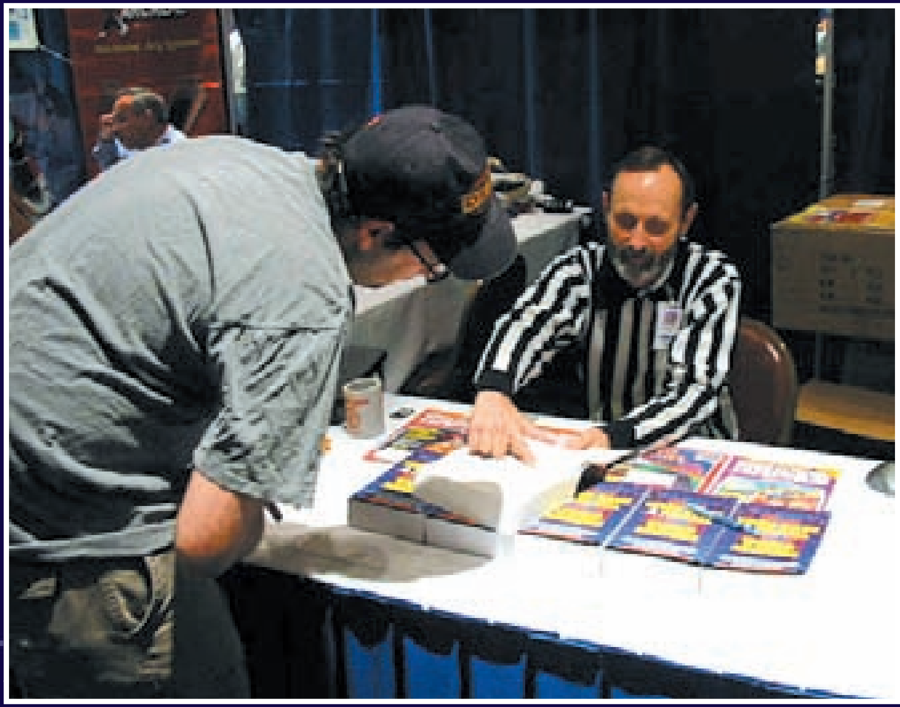
WD: That's increasing remarkably right now. I spend all day every day putting in scores. I've put in a few thousand this month alone, with many of them being part of a backlog that goes back years.

R: Do you have many problems with people cheating, and, if so, how do you deal with the problem?

WD: All the time, unfortunately, especially from the younger players. They haven't developed their sense of fair play yet and are really smart and can see the angles on how to beat the game unfairly. Also, there is a bad element on the internet that gives people the impression that 'getting away with things is cool'. Another contributing factor are the manufacturers that have developed a culture of cheats and codes. Unfortunately, they program games with bugs we have to watch for; sometimes it's necessary for us to watch a game a frame at a time to make sure no cheating has occurred.

R: Do you play many games yourself and have you set any records on the Twin Galaxies site?

WD: In the Eighties I was rather good at ***Galaxian***, ***Gorf***, ***Make Trax*** and ***Centipede***; I actually got 313,000 on ***Ms. Pac-Man*** in 1984. Sadly, I no longer play now because I'm so busy with the scoreboard.



▲ *"That, my friend, is a winning score. Not 65 on Snake."* Walter Day sets another prospective record holder straight.

R: What do you think about the current interest in retro gaming?

WD: All games become retro games eventually. When a manufacturer creates a game, they usually just support it for a few months and then move onto the next title (especially nowadays). Therefore, within a few months, every game loses its player base as the players, as if in a large herd, move onto the next highly hyped release from the manufacturers.

Twin Galaxies is the 'elephants' graveyard of gaming'. As each game enters the forgotten 'Twilight Zone' of the past, we establish official rules, verify submissions and crown the champions. In time, we will support all 100,000-plus titles.

So, retro gaming will continue to grow, because in time every player playing today's GameCube will be considered a-retro gamer because the herd has left him or her behind. At some point it will become unfair to call a gamer a retro gamer, because more people will be playing the relics of the past than the current releases, merely through the huge impact of there being hundreds of thousands of old favourites to chose from, as opposed to the few hundred being released new every month.

R: If we were trying to set a record, what tips could you give us?

WD: Don't cheat, drink your milk and meditate regularly.



IT'S ALL IN THE SCORE...

If you fancy your chances at beating the elite then you've got your work cut out. Some of the scores shown below have taken years of dedication to achieve, so you may want to start practising straight away, as you're unlikely to beat any after a few hours of play.

SPACE INVADERS: 48,480 – Perry Rodgers
GALAXIAN: 399,290 – Gary S Whelan
PAC-MAN: 3,333,360 – Billy Mitchell
GALAGA: 15,999,990 – Stephen Krogman
FROGGER: 442,330 – Mark Robichek
MS PAC-MAN: 920,310 – Chris Ayra
TEMPEST: 1,728,329 – Hector C Vasquez
BREAKOUT : 896 – Zack Hample
ZOO KEEPER: 21,849,650 – Shawn Cram

All scores were set on the original arcade machines and are based on the factory default settings.



Classic Game

A BREED APART



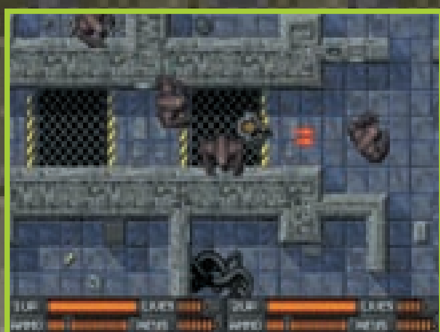
In 1991, a tiny British developer unleashed an exciting run-and-gun game onto the Amiga. Several successful sequels followed, until 1997 when the series took a nosedive and fell off the gaming radar. Ashley Day picks up a bloodied battle rifle and charges into the past to find out why...

Team 17 didn't struggle to be innovators and originators; they struggled to take a genre and make the best possible Amiga version of that genre." So says Marcus Dyson, former project manager at Team 17, and he's right. No matter which genre it tackled, the developer churned out hit after hit. *Project X* was the Amiga's very own *Gradius*, *Superfrog* expertly echoed *Sonic*, and *Alien Breed* was *Gauntlet* with guns.

Its visual style may have been cribbed from HR Giger but *Alien Breed*'s gameplay was pure Atari. The relentless enemies, collectable keys, co-operative play and the disembodied voice alerting players to their low health, all came from the Ed Logg School of Game Design. Yet *Alien Breed* remained a terrific game in its own right, taking these borrowed elements and threading them into one of the smoothest arcade games the Amiga had seen.

The gameplay, already a proven formula, was made more addictive by the tense atmosphere: like the *Alien* movies, any moments of calm were terrifying as you anticipated the appearance of the ominously absent Xenomorphs. When they finally emerged from the depths of the space station they seemed to come in their hundreds, charging towards you and into the flashing lights of gunfire before exploding in a gory mess with a primal screech.

In many ways, *Alien Breed* was a 2D precursor to *Doom*. Much of the game took place in tight corridors and asked little more of the player than to rampage through levels as quickly as possible with a thumb glued to the fire button, only stopping to collect items and buy new weapons from the station's beautifully voiced computer terminals. Additional weapons, such as the Laser and Flamethrower, allowed for quicker destruction of the beasts and cemented the game's emphasis on non-stop blasting action. The seamless mix of sci-fi atmosphere and co-operative shooting thrills made *Alien Breed* an instant hit and it achieved massive critical acclaim. *CU Amiga* awarded the title 90%, claiming that "Team 17 have come up with a winner" – a remarkable achievement for a studio that started life as a small shareware distributor and that had previously made only one commercial game.





FROM SHARE TO WHERE?

Team 17 was founded in 1990 by Martyn Brown, who hand-picked his team from the contacts he made while running the Wakefield-based shareware dealer 17-bit Software. Among them was Rico Holmes, an artist who became responsible for almost all of the graphics in *Alien Breed*. As well as taking his inspiration from the *Alien* movies, Holmes was hugely influenced by the C64 game *Laser Squad* and used those influences to design *Alien Breed*. Another Team 17 founder, Allister Brimble, composed the music for *Breed*. His haunting title theme sent shivers up the spine as it created a foreboding atmosphere that went on to characterise a game that shouldn't be played alone. Andreas Tadic, whose skilful programming ensured that the game ran in a full screen with fast, smooth scrolling, rounded off the main development team.

This small team of enthusiasts had made a game so popular that Amiga owners were soon shouting out for a sequel. Team 17's mailbox was swamped with letters from fans who were quick to offer a list of everything they wanted to see in a follow-up. As the team were aware of *Alien Breed*'s phenomenal popularity, a sequel was already planned but was still some way off. The decision was made to appease eager *Breed*ers by releasing *Alien Breed Special Edition '92*. By doubling the number of levels from six to 12 and introducing new levels that took place in almost complete darkness, the game became twice as good and went on to occupy the charts for over a year.

The true sequel landed in 1993 and was an enormous leap forward from its predecessors. The opening level saw the heroes fight their way into a complex by dodging low-flying helicopters, making it clear that this *Alien Breed* would be

"ALIEN BREED WAS A REMARKABLE FEAT FOR A DEVELOPER THAT HAD PREVIOUSLY RELEASED ONLY ONE COMMERCIAL GAME"



▼ There were 250 ways through Tower Assault. Seen them all?

DON'T OWN AN AMIGA?

Those who feel the urge to play one of the many excellent *Alien Breed* games (we'll pretend that *Killing Grounds* doesn't exist) should head to www.dream17.co.uk where almost all of Team 17's classic Amiga titles can be legally downloaded for free. The site also has a load of other Team 17 goodies such as screensavers and regular news updates. For an alternative look at the *Alien Breed* scene visit www.mentalillusion.co.uk/alienbreed for its interesting *Alien Breed* remake. It's an open source project so anyone with the right software can join in.

"WITH ALIEN BREED 3D AMIGA GAMERS FINALLY HAD A FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER THAT WAS GRAPHICALLY IMPRESSIVE AND ATMOSPHERIC"

much tougher. Some aliens could now shoot back, while the levels were rigged to self-destruct with only a few seconds to escape. This meant that it was foolish to stay in one place for any amount of time and that the weapon upgrades became indispensable. As in the Japanese shooters that Team 17 loved, you wouldn't get far unless you had the right weapons. As well as the standard Machine Gun, *Alien Breed II* offered a Triple Laser, Homing Missiles, Flamethrower, Rebounder and Grenade Launcher. Of these, the Rebounder was the most fun: its bouncy bullets let you dash about while the unsuspecting aliens took one in the head before they even saw you.

Alien Breed II was a guns-blazing arcade game and though its follow-up lost none of the action, *Alien Breed Tower Assault* proved to be much more strategic. The new sequel featured enhancements that vastly improved the existing formula. Each level now had several exits, making the game a branching, non-linear adventure, and depending on which of the 250 unique routes a player took, they would experience extreme contrasts in difficulty and reveal different pieces of the story. To get the most out of *Tower Assault*, and to see each of the massive 50 levels, you had to complete the game several times.

Team 17 also implemented a Retreat mode where players could walk backwards while firing. This made tough situations a little easier and added to the feeling of being a movie hero as you let the aliens chase you down a corridor, knowing that you were the one who would come out alive. Graphical effects were also given a major overhaul, resulting in the best looking of the 2D *Alien Breed* games. The highly detailed graphics created a vivid impression of being in a real world as you encountered crashed fighter ships, discovered mutilated corpses and scavenged from colonists' living quarters. This particular *Alien Breed* has stood the test of time better than most, largely due to its longevity. After several years it's still possible to take unique routes and discover hidden areas and secrets.

DIMENSION JUMP

By 1995 the games market was changing in ways that would affect the industry for the next ten years. *Doom* had begun to rival major religions in its number of faithful converts and soon major software publishers would adopt the attitude that if it wasn't 3D it wasn't worth making. The PC market quickly became overcrowded with 3D *Doom*-alikes and the Amiga would need its own FPS if it was to successfully compete.

After meeting enthusiastic programmer Andy Clitheroe and seeing the first-person engine he had created single-handedly on the Amiga, Team 17 knew that it could be one of the first to bring the genre to the 32-bit A1200 and immediately acquired the young coder and his work. Team 17 saw the opportunities that Andy's engine brought and was soon on the phone to id Software. "I spoke to John Carmack about licensing *Doom* for the Amiga," Marcus Dyson tells us. "He said, 'Technically, it can't be done; you can't do a first-person shooter on the Amiga' and they shut the door on us." Undeterred by Carmack's lack of faith, Team 17 went ahead with the project and built Andy's demo into the first three-dimensional *Alien Breed*.

Alien Breed 3D was technically unlike any of the previous incarnations and required a new set of skilled programmers and artists to push the series into the third dimension. Clitheroe handled all of the coding duties and contributed to the graphics with Team 17 newcomers Michael Green and Charles Blessing. The only person to have previously worked on a Team 17 game was the musician Björn Lynne, composer on *Worms*. Despite mostly being a team of first-timers, Andy and co produced a polished and playable FPS.

Amiga gamers finally had a first-person shooter, which was graphically impressive and highly atmospheric. Level design deserves special mention as this was one of the few Amiga games of this type to use levels with more than one floor and the game played much better for this technically difficult addition. Unfortunately, it felt a little too much like *Doom* and not enough like the traditional *Alien Breed* games. The main reason for this was that there just weren't enough enemies on screen at once; where the 2D games had bombarded the player with waves of aliens this version could only manage to get two or three on the go at any one time. The series' much loved two-player mode returned but also proved to be disappointing as it merely placed two players in a level with no enemies and all the doors open. Nevertheless, *Alien Breed 3D* was an excellent achievement and fully deserved the fan adulation and critical acclaim that it received. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of its sequel…

Confident of their abilities, the new *Alien Breed* development team set about creating an ambitious sequel that would run in real 3D (think *Quake* rather than *Doom*) and in high-resolution full screen. *Alien Breed 3D II: The Killing Grounds* appeared in 1996 and made good on those promises, but at considerable expense. Though the team achieved its lofty graphical ambitions, the game ran at a snail's pace even when using the best graphics card. The non-existent enemy AI was another problem: as soon as you entered a room every alien would already be waiting in the doorway to mess you up.

The highly anticipated level editor also failed to live up to the hype as it required a downloadable patch despite only a few Amiga owners having internet access. Lastly, several players complained that the control method was keyboard-only rather than the mouse-look standard to which PC gamers had become accustomed. It was clear to everyone that Team 17 had rushed *The Killing Grounds* out in order to make a reasonable profit from the diminishing Amiga market. Consequently, *Amiga Power* gave the release a critical mauling, awarding it only 59% – the lowest *Alien Breed* score of all time.

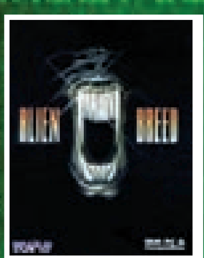
By 1997 the Amiga market was beginning to dry up. Team 17 released its final game for the classic computer and swiftly moved on to the PC and PSone. Choosing to concentrate on the *Worms* franchise, it swiftly forgot about *Alien Breed*. A couple of revival attempts have been made in recent years but neither proved fruitful. The first of these was *Alien Breed Assault*, an RTS that got quite far into development in 1998 before being canned due to lack of publisher interest. *Alien Breed 2K4* was to resurrect the classic 2D gameplay with vastly improved graphics and was even due to include the signature co-op mode. Sadly, the game was put on hold in early 2005 and little of it has been seen since.

Regardless of whether it ever makes a comeback, *Alien Breed* will always be a classic blaster that stands the test of time.

"ALIEN BREED 2K4 WAS DUE TO RESURRECT THE CLASSIC 2D GAMEPLAY WITH IMPROVED GRAPHICS. SADLY, IT WAS PUT ON HOLD EARLY IN 2005 AND HASN'T BEEN SEEN SINCE"

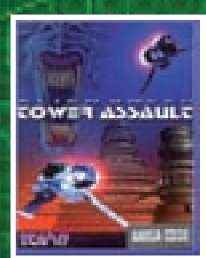
A DIFFERENT BREED

The Alien Breed games were released across different formats but which were the best?



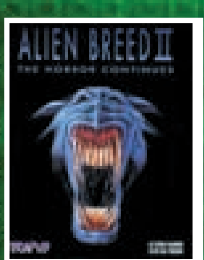
Alien Breed

As well as debuting on the A500, *Alien Breed* also appeared on Commodore's ill-fated CD32 console. While it was identical to the original A500 version, the CD32 disc also contained *Qwak*, a highly addictive platform puzzler, that added extra value for money to those CD32 gamers who already owned the original *Alien Breed*. A PC version of *Alien Breed* was also produced in 1993 and had improved graphics that were identical to those seen in the superb *Tower Assault*.



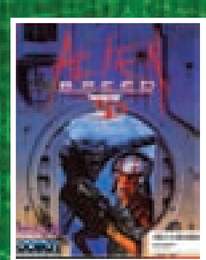
Alien Breed Tower Assault

The best *Alien Breed* game was made even better when it appeared on the CD32. Not only did it include a copy of *Alien Breed II* but also had a CD soundtrack and a rather embarrassing FMV intro featuring Team 17 staff. The PC version, however, was a complete mess that had fewer levels and kicked out the brilliant non-linear gameplay in favour of a boring and restrictive linear route.



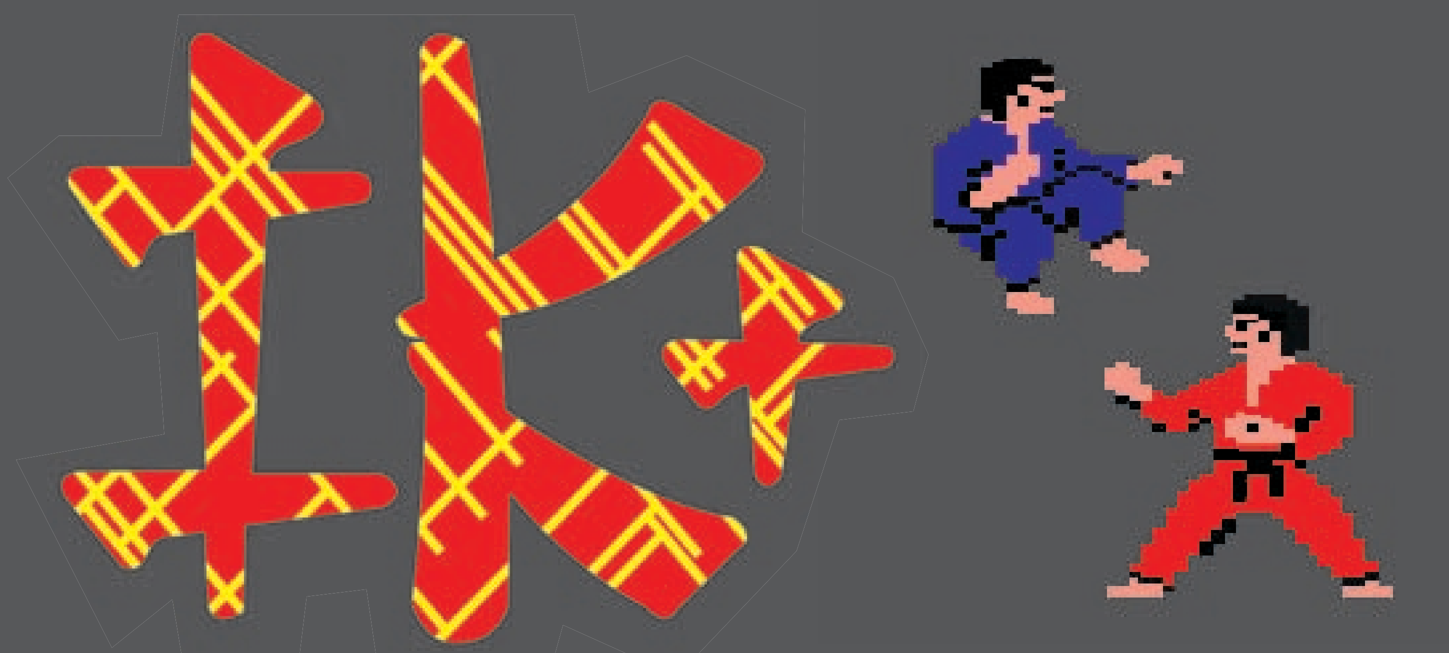
Alien Breed II: The Horror Continues

There were two Amiga versions of *Alien Breed II*. The first was released for the A1200 in December 1993 and the second was released the following January on the A500. The A500 version had fewer colours and the least Aliens, which meant that it ran a little faster and was ultimately a much easier game. Stick with the A1200 version for a better challenge.



Alien Breed 3D

The box for the CD32 version of *Alien Breed* 3D claimed that it had more levels than the floppy disk version. Don't believe a word of it. It does include a digital audio soundtrack, though, making it slightly superior to the floppy edition. *Alien Breed 3D II: The Killing Grounds* proved a massive disappointment. Not only was it incredibly slow, it also featured uninspired levels, extremely disappointing visuals and a horrific aiming system. Stick with the original…



THREE MEN IN PYJAMAS

Format: C64, Amiga
Release: 1987
Developer: Archer Maclean

Fish plop the harbour. Three men stand in the late sun. A punch to the bollocks.

Not much of a haiku, admittedly, but one that goes someway to illustrating the beauty, simplicity and impact of Archer Maclean's follow-up to 1986's *International Karate*. The game may be very Zen, but it deserves much more consideration. *IK+* is brutal, yet fair and rewards speed and accuracy while simplicity is its key.

Three fighters decked in blue, white or red face off simultaneously. Points are awarded for successful strikes. The more fancy the strike, the more points awarded, while any strike will floor an opponent with one hit. The first combatant to six points wins the round. Easy. As long as both human players remain in the top two it's easy.

Up to two human players may fight, but there are always three fighters in each match with the spare being controlled by artificial intelligence. Initially this guy is a slab of meat for you both to practise on, but as the matches progress his increased aggression makes for a worthy opponent, and one that means that you won't feel safe until both other fighters lie on the floor. Indeed, taking out two adversaries quickly and efficiently is a pleasure to be savoured and one that is reminiscent of the power felt when playing *Kung-Fu Master*, or a bar brawl starring Clint Eastwood and an orangutan. It feels good.

Each of the game's fighters has mastery of the same 13-move karate style, and all have trousers that will fall down whenever you follow the high-score table's advice and try "pressing T". Karate, it seems, doesn't need Jackie Chan with his head up a turkey's ass to be funny. It doesn't need a phone directory for a moves list either. All it just has to make a crack to the family jewels worthy of a sound sample from *Enter The Dragon*.

Because all potential karate champs stand on the same two-dimensional plane, landing a successful attack requires the player to assume the correct distance from their opponent. Get it wrong and the intended blow will land too soon or too late (even though pixels seem to connect) and you won't get to hear something that resembles a melon being whipped as it's slammed in a car door, followed by a sorry whine. Learning the correct distance for the right attack is vital or one second you're somersaulting along the screen, joyous that you've just been awarded a brown belt, the next you're on the floor while valuable points are being fought over by

▼ Sure, the fighters looked better on the Amiga, but we'd have to take issue with that red suit/pink belt combo.



▼ You're not wrong 'red could do better'. That horizontal stance won't do him any favours.



DAVE LEE TRAVIS

There was a time when game music mattered so much that *Zzap! 64* magazine featured a chart, which was always fought over by two titans of the art form – Rob Hubbard and Martin Galway. Despite his dominance throughout the charts of 1987, Hubbard's infectiously camp martial arts synth-pop for *IK+* failed to even make the top ten. This was nothing to do with a lack of finesse in the track, but was more to do with the high quality and huge quantity of Hubbard's output. *IK+*'s soundtrack is a beauty, but compared to the likes of *Wizball, Spellbound, Warhawk*… the man was a victim of his own success.

▼ Clutching his stomach, White Fighter sank to the ground. Those 17 strength-giving Weetabix had turned his insides to cement.



those still conscious.

By focusing on points rather than knock-outs and including a third fighter who's just as eager to win, *IK+* guarantees fights where both players can lose, while its basic controls mean that anyone can quickly learn to win. But, yes, it is in essence the same game as *International Karate*, but with an extra character and bonus rounds that are often more tense than the main event.

Every three rounds the current winner is forced to stand in the centre of the ring and repel attacks. Not from fist, feet or spear, but from bomb or bouncing ball. Bombs need to be knocked off screen with a perfectly positioned kick before they detonate. The balls come from both sides, bounce at various heights denoted by their colour, and can be deflected with the use of a shield. Sounds easy. Starts off easy. Then the speed of the balls or the frequency of the bombs increases, as does your required concentration until you're unaware of how you managed to survive so long. As soon as you're aware of this unawareness, you're dead.

While the bomb bonus' requirement for swift and accurate sweep kicks will leave you exasperated when you find yourself sweeping just a pixel too far from a definite strike, the ball/shield combo is a classic in its own right. When the gong of a deflection starts to blend with the constant bonging of the balls and the points start climbing, the sensation of becoming a finely tuned ball-deflecting machine descends like a warm cloak that you know could shatter at any second. Simple, but blink and you'd never think a bouncing ball could cause so much pain.

Blending karate, balls, bombs and the cry of a man who's just had his testicles detonated and setting it all against a beautifully animated backdrop makes a recipe for martial arts that has its tongue in its cheek, but is no less serious.

The beat-'em-up genre has since moved on. It has claimed extra buttons, added parries, demanded super moves and has evolved into a high-speed game of scissors-paper-stone. Looking back it is easy to see *IK+* as a curiosity more memorable for Rob Hubbard's sublime oriental electro-cheese instrumental.

Sure, it's *Pole Position* to *Virtua Fighter*'s *Burnout 3*. Progression has been made and finer games have been produced. Few have managed to capture the agony and the ecstasy of a snap to the groin, however. Few have managed to make a simple tap of a stick feel like the most devastating punch on the planet.



OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1987



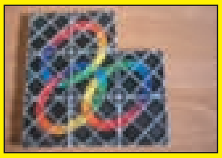
AT THE MOVIES

Ralph Macchio modified his crane kick technique and a host of poorly sketched Japanese stereotypes got reminded that their karate was a joke when set against a horny kid from New Jersey. He did it all for the glory of love. Classic.



ON THE RADIO

Black Francis, Kim Deal, Joey Santiago and David Lovering are The Pixies and guitar rock will not have an excuse to suck until The Darkness ruin it for everyone, Scottish art students are allowed amplifiers and Nazi uniforms and Coldplay fail to be fed to wild pigs.



TOP TOY

There was something sad and possibly even poetic about the release of the Rubik's Magic. For some reason folding shiny coloured card wasn't as fun as peeling stickers off a plastic cube, and its poor sales signified a shift from traditional to electronic entertainment. We blame videogames.



CARTOON HEROES

Ex-*Three Of A Kind* girl Tracey Ullman was granted a programme to showcase her talents on the Fox network, her most memorable being the ability to share airtime with animation shorts following a family called The Simpsons. File Tracey under 'not totally worthless, actually' then.



FASHION VICTIM

They shouted other WORD and wore VW BADGES. They were the Beastie BOYS, rhymes sweet like MOLASSES. Car insignia round ya neck. Ya vandalised a RIDE, but didn't stop to CHECK? The owner lives next DOOR, now your teeth are broken. You chewing FLOOR and your face is SOAKIN'.

Wish You We

While you were playing Jet Set

Story: John Szczepaniak

When people think about the origins of gaming, they generally only think of two distinct regions: 'the east' and 'the west' – Japan, America and the UK. But while the modern gaming scene might be dominated by globalisation and giant corporations, dig a little deeper and you'll find that gaming has a much richer history than you realise; one that's at risk of being completely forgotten.

During the Eighties and Nineties, regions that were caught up in tense political or trade situations (such as South Africa, the Middle East and the USSR), surprisingly had blossoming gaming scenes complete with their own hackers, designers, traders and, of course, passionate gamers. And all this despite little or no official market support. This was an era when camels carrying goods across the desert and Chinese junks moored in black-market harbours were a reality, and where new hardware could be traded for a nice bottle of Zabruvka on the other side of the iron curtain.

Despite circumstances that seemingly went against them, these places had hidden and thriving games scenes, some that would even be the envy of other gamers. Where you will find teenagers, you will inevitably find gaming.

One interesting point to note is that due to the fact some of these countries were excluded from the world stage to some degree, piracy was present in all of them. It's perhaps unsurprising, since the extortionate pricing of games and the lack of official market support meant the average person would not have had access to such things otherwise.

Here's a selection of personal recollections from gamers who experienced gaming's formative years in ways that we might not



Greetings from South Africa!

John Szczepaniak, South Africa

The late Eighties and early Nineties was a great era to be a gamer in South Africa. Due to the sanctions, there was no obvious PAL games market, despite being a PAL television region. As a result of no official market support and the Chinese/Hong Kong immigrant population there was a mix of grey importers and low-priced far-east bootlegs. Every kid owned a Famicom bootleg system; it was so popular that Reggies, the South African equivalent of Toys R Us, decided to make its own Famicom clone.

There were always hundreds of Famicom games, including some titles not available anywhere else. Notably we had several Famicom Disc System-only games that had been hacked and placed onto cartridges, such as *Super Mario Bros 2 (The Lost Levels)* and *Zelda*. Even more exciting was that US/UK-exclusive NES games were also converted to Famicom cartridges. We ended up getting games that had never even reached Japan, such as *Alien 3* and *Snake's Revenge*. This meant that despite having Japanese hardware, our RPGs could be in English.

Most game stores were filled with a kaleidoscope of cartridges, all emblazoned with their original Japanese box art. We were lucky enough to receive games in their original unedited formats as their creators had envisioned, unlike many poor European localisations, so games like *Ice Climber* had seals to be clubbed, not yetis.

When walking into your average games store asking to buy a Mega Drive, a common response from the owner would be: "You want American? You want Japanese?" Store shelves were lined with systems from each NTSC region, ready to run directly out of the box, supplemented with the correct TV cables and voltage adapters (with the exception of the SNES, where they tended to stock only the US model as it was cheaper and easier to mod in order to run Japanese carts).

While the average gamer was happy with the latest SNES and MD titles from Japan and the US, keen-eyed players went for the more pricey import Turbo Duo and Neo-Geo AES systems. I was in a lucky position, being friends with a guy from Hong Kong whose father ran an import store; as a result, I had access to some of the latest Duo and AES games.

With the arrival of the post-apartheid government and the re-opening of trade, corporations started to view us as another territory to be officially marketed. More importantly, another territory to control in order to finally put an end to any non-conventional gaming.

A relative who recently visited South Africa told me some sad news; many of the games stores I used to frequent had closed. The big companies were ensuring that gamers played only official products specifically for that region. You can't even find Famicom bootlegs easily now. An era of gaming had ended.

"WE WERE LUCKY ENOUGH TO GET GAMES IN THEIR ORIGINAL UNEDITED FORMS"

re There...?

Willy the rest of the world was waking up to gaming too

Alvaro Pacheco, Brazil

In Brazil, arcade gaming was much more popular than home gaming. Many people weren't even aware of many home titles, as they only knew what was available in the arcades. The arcade scene was so popular because games were so affordable to play (25 cents or so per game) compared to their console counterparts. In fact, the arcades were so popular that many kids – including my older brother – used to fail the school year after skipping class to play games like *The Simpsons*, *Toki*, *Combatribes*, *Final Fight* and, of course, *Street Fighter II*. Everywhere you went there were arcade machines, even in bread shops. There was an arcade on almost every street, sometimes more than one, with every variety of game you can imagine.

I've even seen many people get beaten up at arcades for trying to butt into someone else's game. People take that stuff seriously here – always aiming for a better run than before, or the elusive one-credit clear. We'd even wear 'thumb gloves' to stop getting all blistered up when we were playing.

As a kid I was lucky enough to live in a nice area, so my street had about 30 or so kids who all had their own videogame systems. Back in the Eighties and Nineties it was Sega's Master System that was most popular.

I still own *Mônica No Castelo Do Dragão*, which was a Brazil-only legal remake of *Wonder Boy In Monster Land* done by a Brazilian team of developers from a company called Tec Toy that had licensed the original game. It starred Mônica, who featured in our country's most popular comic book. It was the only legal remake of *Wonder Boy* as far as I know, but there were many unofficial hacks floating around, including a *Mega Man* version on the Master System.

Apart from Tec Toy, there were only a few other Brazilian game companies like Dynacom, Gradiente and CCE, though there are more today. Tec Toy did *Street Fighter II* for the Master System, but it was rubbish as you could only pick from about four characters. *Mortal Kombat* was even worse… Tec Toy was still releasing MS games up until the late Nineties, and Brazilian gamers were still enjoying Sega's 8-bit machine while the rest of the world was gripped by Saturn and PSone fever.

> "MANY KIDS USED TO FAIL THE SCHOOL YEAR AFTER SKIPPING CLASS TO PLAY ARCADE GAMES"

Despite the Master System's overwhelming popularity, there was still plenty of interest in the NES. It was possible to get hold of a 'Phantom System' that played American and Japanese games; in fact, some companies started releasing Nintendo games with a cartridge pin connector at either end for both Famicom and NES systems, though most people owned an import adaptor. Many gamers preferred legitimate Japanese imports for certain titles (which were somehow cheaper), but bootlegging was, and still is, huge in Brazil.

Some people also still had Ataris in the early Nineties, and I've played *River Raid*, *Enduro*, *Spider-Man* and a few others on them. There's some excitement about certain Brazil-only Atari titles, but I've never seen them. As for really old stuff, on occasion there have even been ancient Odyssey machines for sale. Due to poor manufacturing and the Brazilian heat, the AC adaptors would get incredibly hot after a while and you'd need a fan just so they'd last longer. One of my friends went as far as putting them in the freezer so they could cool off.

On my street there were some kids with Super Nintendos and Mega Drives, but for 16-bit systems the SNES was all the rage. We used to cram over 12 kids into a bedroom to take turns playing whatever there was – these were mostly fighting games. The Mega Drive held its own with shooting games and a couple of popular titles, but was no match for the all-powerful SNES. We used to play games like *Legend Of Zelda: Link To The Past* (where my best friend used to keep a dictionary next to him), and other classics.

While *Mario* and *Sonic* were well-liked, the most popular games were shooters and fighters. With the arcade scene as huge as ever, we'd practise *Street Fighter* at home, then go show off in the arcades.

PC gaming when I was younger consisted of *Maniac Mansion*, *Prince Of Persia*, *California Games* and Brazilian games like *AV: Ases do Vôlei*. There were also puzzle games like *Sokoban* and I'm pretty sure *Scorched Earth* was also around back then. But that was pretty much all that was available. PC games weren't popular as not many people had PCs. The PC I used belonged to my mum's company, meaning I got to mess around on the 286 during the night.

Now the PS2 dominates the market, since you can't bootleg GameCube games and most Brazilians think the Xbox just plain sucks. For collectors there are general electronics stores that sell games as well as specialised gaming stores, otherwise today we use internet auction sites.



Hello from Brazil!

Mark Wong, Malaysia

While gaming did exist in Malaysia during the Eighties, it was not until the end of that decade that I first really experienced them. My family bought an IBM computer which was easy to get hold if you could afford it, but was very expensive back then.

I still remember when I was six and my dad introduced me to the new IBM, which had come pre-loaded with *Midnight Rescue*. It had English text, which was fine since I learnt English at school and many Malaysian-Chinese speak a combination of English and Cantonese. There were Cantonese games available that originated in places like Taiwan, China and Malaysia, but I couldn't play them due to the text.

Midnight Rescue was like a learning experience at that age, where you had to solve mysteries and work out puzzles, and it was something even my mother and father played. The three of us would take it in turns to play late into the night, sometimes until midnight.

Arcades were also very popular, but the biggest boom was with *Street Fighter*, especially at a highland resort just outside Kuala Lumpur where gamers would meet to set up mini-tournaments and challenge each other. Most teenagers there also enjoyed a special style of Malaysian tea (Teh Tarik) bought from Mamak stalls, where it was combined with milk and poured from a great height to froth it up, making it almost like cappuccino, so it was common to see arcade gamers celebrate winning a match or tournament by heading off to the nearby Mamak stall for a cup of this special tea, which is the Malaysian equivalent of going to the pub for a pint.

At that particular resort they had a very large area dedicated to all kinds of arcade games. Racing games were my favourite, and the whole family would play at the arcade centre; my mother, father and younger brother. Gaming was something for everyone to enjoy. When I was 12 I noticed a revolution in graphics and sound, as well as the beginning of the internet. This is when gaming really started to pick up. We would go to school and talk about the latest games we had, how to proceed to the next level, which games were better and we'd often share games.

It was also the introduction of the PlayStation, whose original games were much more expensive than computer games, so piracy was quite common and widespread. While I never owned one, my cousins did; it was a Japanese system since most of our electronics came from Japan.

Secondary school meant multiplayer games, especially in cybercafés nearing the end of the Nineties. We challenged each other a lot and formed clans to enter competitions, with more and more gamers emerging. There is a lot of excitement in Malaysia surrounding the World Cyber Games tournament, and each year we send many players to compete, and each year we keep getting better. It was from humble beginnings on computer games like *Midnight Rescue* that sparked the flames leading to large Malaysian clan championships and entry into the WCG. Who would have thought we'd come so far?



▲ The World Cyber Games tournament has seen players from Malaysia prove they're among the best.

"ARCADES WERE POPULAR, BUT THE BIG BOOM CAME WITH STREET FIGHTER"



Hello from Malaysia!

Soliman AlWahid, Saudi Arabia

The first signs of the spread of videogames in the Gulf probably appeared some time around the early Eighties on the home computer scene in the era of the MSX, Commodore and Amiga. Games were the most popular software for those machines (rather than 'office' software) so computer importers felt there would be demand for the videogame consoles just starting to get popular in the US and Japan. Most famous of all consoles in the earliest era was the Atari 2600. To this day in Arabic slang, the word 'Atari' is synonymous with consoles.

The 2600 was the first console to gain popularity in the Gulf and thus started many on a lifelong love affair with videogaming. It created more demand for games, causing importers who were encouraged by the success of the 2600 to import several consoles like the Intellivision, but they weren't quite so popular.

Gaming was kept alive throughout the Eighties thanks to the MSX and the 2600. Even though they were basically the same thing, the NES never sold well and was hardly ever imported (unlike its Japanese equivalent, the Famicom, which sold like crazy and by the mid-Nineties was a household name).

The Famicom started the golden age of videogames in the Gulf. A torrent of bootlegs from Hong Kong and Malaysia, among other places, helped flood the market, cementing the machine's popularity. At one point you could even find Famicom games in grocery stores.

Despite the popularity of the SNES, it was Sega's Mega Drive that proved to be the more popular machine, and many more games were imported for it. More importantly, by 1995 the first Arabic magazine dedicated to gaming news was released and began reviewing import Jaguar, Mega Drive and SNES games (these days you can find dozens of Arabic publications dedicated to all things gaming-related).

"THE ATARI 2600 WAS THE MOST FAMOUS SYSTEM. TO THIS DAY IN ARABIC SLANG, 'ATARI' IS SYNONYMOUS WITH CONSOLES"

Sales of the PlayStation and the Saturn only caught up with sales of cartridge-based consoles around 1996. The Neo-Geo CD and the Sega CD were released before them and were also relatively successful, but didn't sell as well as the next generation of CD-based consoles, possibly because they did not have a large bootleg market to popularise them. After around 1998, sales of pirate games actually exceeded those of legitimate games.

Bootlegging boomed with the PlayStation because CDs could be copied cheaply and locally, unlike cartridges, which had to be imported. You could walk into most videogame stores and ask what games they had and the dealer would produce several huge books, which on closer inspection turned out to be heavy-duty picture albums used as catalogues for several hundred photocopied PSX game covers.

But despite the ever-popular bootleg scene, official consoles and games were always available, and gamers bought those too.



Greetings from Saudi Arabia!



Hello from Iran!

Amir Asghari, Iran

Iran during the Eighties was like a war zone and kept under economic sanctions. If you were a gamer you had to either go to the bootleg market for your gaming fix, or 'grey import' stores such as those in the relatively safe capital, Tehran.

Either way, we had to take our chances when buying from electronics stores, running the risk of either being killed or finding that the store might have been reduced to rubble. Good gaming stock wasn't always easy to come by where I lived since trucks from other major cities could be hijacked by Iraqi aircraft.

When I was a small child, my father came home brandishing a brand new Japanese MSX console, including a complete boxed copy of the original *Metal Gear*. Little did I realise that this humble beginning would develop into a lifelong passion for all things *Metal Gear*-related.

Setting up the MSX was difficult at first. A neighbour who was a Commodore 64 whizz-kid had to help my father out. After much yelling, the machine did work properly, and my gaming life began.

Today, it's a very different situation. Japan is now one of the country's biggest trading partners, and where there's a way, there'll be gamers there to play

1987 ...TM MAILBOX

Hello from Russia!



Alex Smaliy, Russia

My earliest videogaming memories were formed in the many arcades that were found in most Russian amusement parks. The one I used to live near had titles like *Street Fighter* (which always had a big crowd around it) and *Double Dragon* in addition to marksmanship booths and video ninepins – a game that was similar to bowling, but with stackable pins.

I didn't play many games, though, as the tokens cost a fortune and the machines tended to eat them far too quickly.

If the arcades proved too expensive, you could always try out the 'computer rooms' that were set up at summer camps and company resorts. Run by enthusiasts, you paid by the minute and had access to a variety of games and machines. Apple IIs, Atari 2600s, NESs and Spectrums were just a few of the many machines available and the games on offer ranged from *Joust* to *Lode Runner*.

In the early Nineties, my grandparents saved up some money and bought me a new console. It was a black, rectangular plastic box from Hong Kong with a NES chip inside. It was called Dandy, had a picture of Babar on the front and came with two games – *Power Blade 2* and *Jungle Book*. Actually, *Jungle Book* was a two-for-one cartridge, with a bad burn of *Robocop* as a sort of bonus.

There were a lot of 'omnibus' carts floating around, with prices going up based on how many games were on each cart and how advanced the graphics were. All the carts were obvious HK hack-jobs, mostly with the Chinese or Japanese text intact.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about gaming in Russia is that no-one there knows that *Tetris* was actually created by a Russian. Then again, almost no-one in Russia knows what *Tetris* actually is, period. If there were any other specifically Russian-developed console or computer games back then, I'd never heard of them. Games were things that came from China, and that was that.

There was also very little sense that they were advancing, or getting more popular, or anything to that effect. They were strictly a relatively obscure, imported children's toy.

"NO-ONE HERE KNOWS THAT TETRIS WAS CREATED BY A RUSSIAN. BUT NO-ONE KNOWS WHAT TETRIS IS"

▼ Summer camps set up computer rooms to let gamers get to grips with technology.



Long Live Retro!

During my last visit some years ago, all the neighbourhood kids seemed to spend time at a parlour that opened down the street where they paid by the minute to play Russian hacks of *Diablo*, *StarCraft* and *Crazy Taxi*.

It was still run by a hobbyist with horn-rimmed glasses and there were a lot of older teens and rich kids whose parents you didn't want to upset. Everything cool or new in Russia always seemed to get there via less than savoury channels, and videogames were hardly going to be an exception.



Greetings from Lithuania!

"AS LITHUANIAN LIFE TRANSFORMED, THOSE SEGA CONSOLES WERE REPLACED BY SONY'S PLAYSTATION"

Mantas Bilius, Lithuania

Lithuania was a part of the USSR until 1990, and was one of the first countries to gain independence. Gaming for us was virtually the same as in central Russia, but console games (I had a system called Zilithon) were almost all in English.

Later in my town they opened some games parlours. At first they were full of Sega consoles – *Sonic* was, of course, very popular and one of my personal favourites.

As time passed and Lithuanian life transformed all around me, they changed those Sega consoles into Sony PlayStations, complete with copies of *Red Alert* which also proved popular in post-Soviet Lithuania. Only a few years ago some PC cafes were opened, and they became packed in just few days.

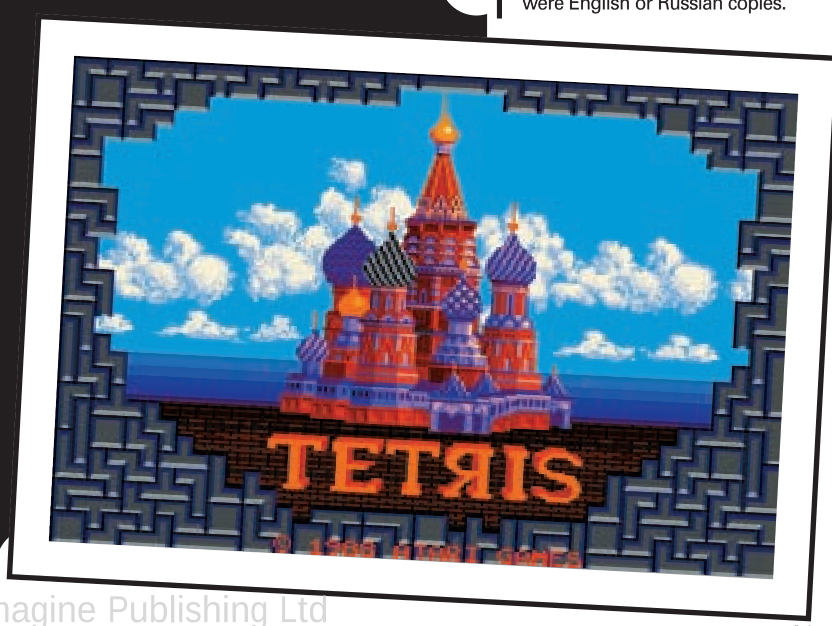
As for me personally, I used to play or mostly watch other kids playing these Sega games and then the PlayStation. In the mid-Nineties at school they finally gained funding and built a computer room. So as a result, myself and some other guys would play *Quake II* on Fridays until midnight.

One final thing – I didn't actually see an original CD until I moved to Germany. All the CDs in Lithuania were English or Russian copies.

THE GREATEST RUSSIAN GAME...

...That The Russians Didn't Know About

Tetris **is synonymous with Nintendo's Game Boy but was actually the brainchild of a Russian, Alexey Pajitnov. Created in 1985 after Pajitnov was inspired by puzzle game pentominoes, the game prompted protracted legal wrangling over its publishing rights. It was first spotted in 1986 in Hungary by British publisher Robert Stein, who made the first move in the publishing war by selling the rights before they belonged to him. Contractual quibbles and obstinacy on all sides led to a three-year battle which finally saw Nintendo snap up the home console rights to the game. Pajitnov saw no money from the phenomenal success of the game, though in 1996 he set up The Tetris Company, which has provided him with some royalties.**



Why Don't They Remake...

RAMPART

WHO'S THE REAL KING OF THE CASTLE?

Release: **1990**
Format: **Arcade (Various Home Systems)**
Publisher: **Atari**
Developer: **In-House**

When the first *Midway Arcade Treasures* was released, we were overjoyed to discover that Atari's *Rampart* was just one of the great games that had made it onto the excellent compilation. Often erroneously referred to as *Ramparts* (a *Rampage* clone that appeared on various 8-bit computers), *Rampart* is a wonderful puzzle/strategy title that's still addictive after 14 years.

Although it featured a very enjoyable single-player game that saw you defending your castle's sturdy walls from cannonball-hurling opponents, it was the multiplayer game where *Rampart* really shone. Conquests were fought over land that was split between two or three players. Each player had several castles to protect, which was achieved by building walls around the strongholds. Once your fortress was secure, you then had ten seconds to place a set amount of cannons within your castle walls.

With the cannons in place, it was a simple matter of sending several volleys of cannonballs against your opponents to try to destroy as many of their fortifications as possible. After the smoke had cleared each player then had a further 20 seconds to rebuild their castle walls; fail to reconstruct your defences within the strict time limit and the game was over.

Every wall was made up of *Tetris*-style blocks and you wouldn't gain access to a new brick until the last was safely in place. All movement was carried out via a trackball (although a later two-player version used joysticks), which allowed for some very precise positioning. If you were able to rebuild your castle quickly enough, you could attempt to extend your walls to the other strongholds within the vicinity. Of course, your opponents were doing exactly the same thing, and while larger strongholds enabled you to place a greater number of cannons it also meant that they took longer to construct…

Playing *Rampart* was an exercise in both skill and judgement. It was all too easy to overstep your boundaries and greed would frequently cost you the game. Despite this, spinning the trackball for all you were worth and frantically trying to re-build your destroyed walls was incredibly addictive and it remains a multiplayer classic.

While *Rampart* would benefit greatly from analogue control, we could still see it working quite well on the ever-popular Game Boy Advance, though the arrival of Nintendo's DS creates a range of exciting possibilities. The top screen, for example, could display the traditional *Rampart* view and be navigated via the D-pad, while the second screen could let you zoom into the desired castle and rebuild its walls with the DS's stylus.

Failing that we'd be quite happy to see *Rampart* appear on the PS2 or Xbox with some sort of network play features. We're not interested in fancy graphics (after all, *Rampart* was never ground-breaking to look at) but the ability to challenge players online and maybe even increase the number of opponents to four could be an opportunity that's too good to miss.

ONE POPULAR TITLE

While it never achieved the dominating success of *Lemmings*, *Rampart* still appeared on a surprising amount of computers and consoles. The game's lack of flashy visuals was perhaps the main reason for its multiple conversions, although our favourites have to be the SNES and Atari Lynx iterations. The SNES used some jazzy Mode 7 trickery to great effect, while clever use of cut-scenes and a non-cluttered screen made playing *Rampart* on the Lynx a joy. Regardless of which version you may end up playing, *Rampart*'s brilliance is obvious to see.





▲ It might look like an RTS, but *Rampart* saw some frantic wall-building, cannon-firing and trackball-rolling.



▲ Blow your enemy's castle to bits and bombard his puny defences. All in the name of fun.

WHO EVER SAID CATCHING NEWTS WAS FUN?

A•L•I•E•N•S

Release: 1990
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House

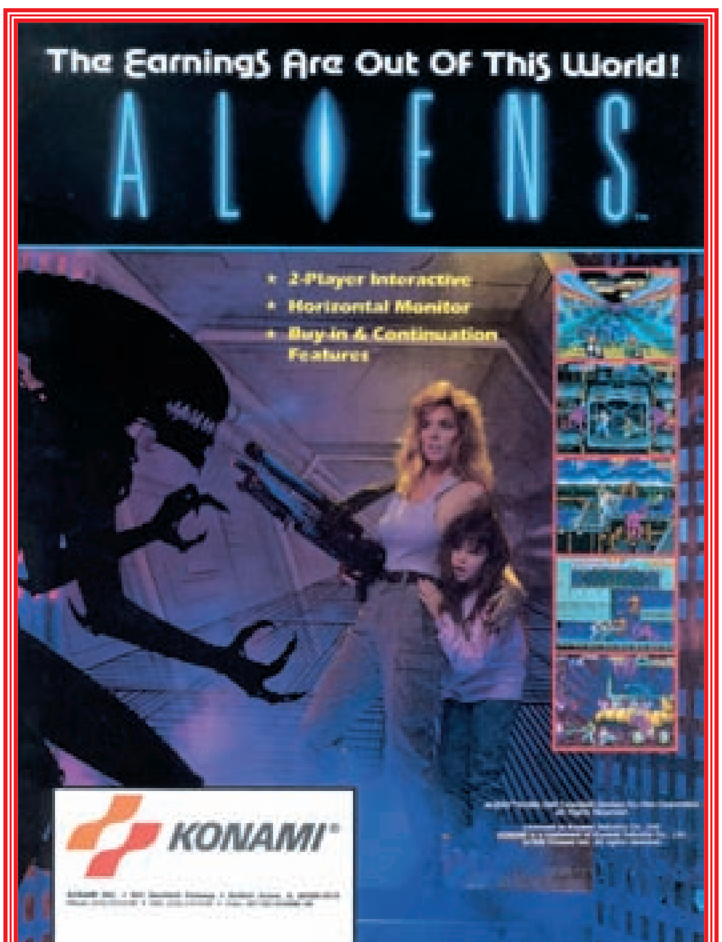
Never mind the fact it shared little in common with the actual movie (flying aliens, anyone?) – Konami's classic shooter remains a firm favourite in the office. While *Aliens* delivered some strong level design and a bewildering array of ferocious xenomorphs (that stretched artistic licence to the limit), few stages of the game were able to match the exhilarating APC chase that saw you hurtling into the screen in search of the missing girl, Newt.

After disposing of level one's huge long-necked boss, Ripley (and Hicks if you were playing with a friend) set off in a conveniently parked personnel carrier and continued her rather dangerous quest for Newt. After the traditional 2D romp of stage one, rushing into the screen came as a nasty (yet exciting) shock and your mouth dropped open as you fought with the hectic controls. Aliens would approach at a tremendous pace and great skill was required in order to take down every last one. A bar at the top of the screen gave you a clear indication of how far away from your prize you were, while your ever-diminishing health ensured you played to the best of your ability.



As more aliens succumbed to your frenetic firepower, you eventually reached your goal and the huge APC came to a thunderous halt. Your elation was only short-lived, though, as a large winged beast appeared, from out of nowhere, and carried the troublesome tyke away. Well, what did you expect? It was only the second level after all…





ALIENS (Arcade) Konami, 1986 – Original US Arcade Flyer



Rising Sun Retro

Think you know everything about gaming? Think again. We can point out a whole world of great import titles that you might have never played or even heard of, which is why we feel it's important to bring these classics to your attention…

S•U•Z•U•K•I B•A•K•U•H•A•T•S•U

Release: 2000
Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Enix
Developer: In-House

Why is it always the simplest and most enjoyable concepts that get ignored by the West? Games like *Super Monkey Ball* and *Kula World*/*Roll Away* all prove that basic puzzle titles can be the most addictive, and yet there are plenty more we can think of that never made it over the Japanese border. Take *Suzuki Bakuhatsu*, for instance – a perfect example of Enix's ingenuity and imagination.

Literally translated as 'Suzuki Explosion', the concept behind *Suzuki Bakuhatsu* is far simpler than the story used to explain it. Through a number of cut-scenes, the game introduces us to Suzuki (played by actress Rin Ozawa), the daughter of a bomb-disposal expert and an all-round average lady. At least, she would be if it wasn't for the fact that every event in her life is doomed to end in an explosion of some kind – for reasons that are never fully explained, the poor girl keeps finding bombs disguised as everyday objects wherever she goes.

Naturally, it's here that the game begins: once each cut-scene has ended and Suzuki has encountered another bomb it's your job to move in and try to disarm it before the thing goes off. Straightforward? Well, it is… in theory. But if the game was that easy, it wouldn't be nearly as addictive as it is.

You see, while the earlier challenges – such as having to diffuse Suzuki's breakfast orange (yes, really) and her mobile phone – aren't too tricky once you get the hang of it, things move on at a breakneck pace as the levels progress. Your basic tools – consisting of a screwdriver, some wire clippers and a roll of tape – allow you to interact with the various obstacles that you'll come across (screws, solid wires and frayed ends that have to be connected back together), but knowing when to use each one is only half the battle.

The trick really lies in being able to dismantle each object in the first place in order to get to the bomb inside before the time limit expires; being everyday items such as a doorknob, a cassette tape, a gun and even the moon, finding the right entry points (and circumnavigating the dead ends and traps that hamper you later on) isn't exactly easy.

Sure, you can pan around each 3D object in fixed steps to get the best view of the task at hand but that doesn't always make things any more obvious. Will that screw set off a trap that shortens the timer from five minutes to ten seconds? Should I reconnect the red wire? Is that hammer going to hit the detonator if I make one wrong move?

It's such tension and more besides that makes *Suzuki Bakuhatsu* so playable, and considering the lack of Japanese text we can't imagine why it never got a Western release. Well, besides the fact that it's so darn weird, of course.

HELPFUL HINTS

As we said, there's very little Japanese text in *Suzuki Bakuhatsu* with most of it appearing in the form of note panels stuck in convenient places around each object. Not being fluent in written Japanese most of it goes over our heads, although many of the panels are helpful pointers on where to go next. Some, however, are just plain insulting – considering we know the Japanese for 'idiot', we can at least tell if we're going down the wrong path on some levels…

▼ For dramatic effect, why not play *Suzuki Bakuhatsu* wearing a blast-proof suit?





▲ Red wire? Blue wire? Make the wrong choice and it's time to say goodbye to your eyebrows.

ED-209 IN ROBOCOP

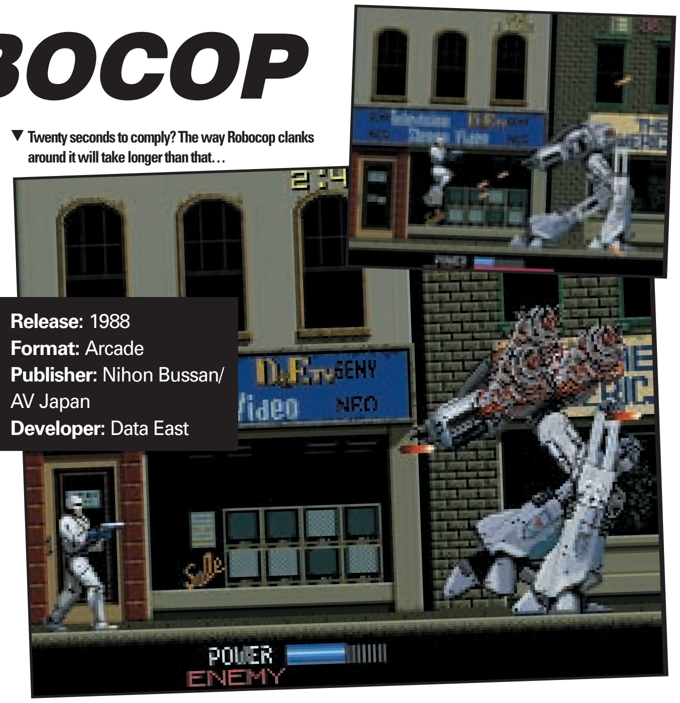
Ah, Robocop – part man, part machine, great game. Ocean may have released some fantastic home versions of Paul Verhoeven's classic, but it was the Data East arcade game that got our blood racing – especially as you got to face off against Robo's nemesis, ED-209.

Of course, you had to reach it first, and when you're controlling a metal-clad cyborg who's as agile as an arthritic pensioner you'd be forgiven for taking a few attempts. Sure, he may have moved with all the finesse of a broken Tesco trolley, but at least the tin-can law enforcer was no slouch with his fists – handy, considering the amount of enemies that were thrown at you. Luckily, you quickly gained access to your gun, and after a few upgrades – and some rather frantic blasting – were finally ready to go cyborg-a-droido.

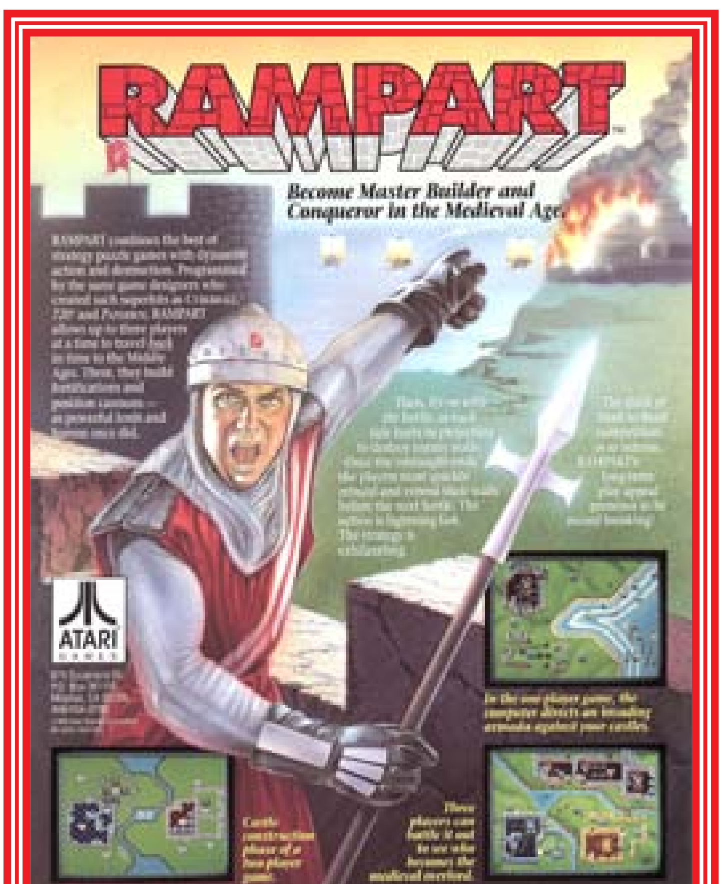
Storming onto the screen in all his metallic glory, ED began firing like a droid possessed and it was easy to get caught at the back of the screen and take a bodyful of hot lead. If you were able to avoid ED-209's fire (tricky when you leapt around as if the air was made of treacle) you could quickly counter-attack and position yourself for its next assault.

Time everything correctly and it was possible to take the mad droid down before it completed a second pass. Squealing like a deranged infant, ED-209 backed away and disappeared off screen, leaving the metallic cop to twirl his gun, look straight at you and "thank you for your co-operation." No, thank *you*.

▼ Twenty seconds to comply? The way Robocop clanks around it will take longer than that…



Release: 1988
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Nihon Bussan/ AV Japan
Developer: Data East



RAMPART (Arcade) Atari, 1990 – Original arcade flyer



GREAT GAME BOSSES...

PSYCHO MANTIS – METAL GEAR

Release: 1998
Format: PlayStation
Publisher: In-House
Developer: Konami

While *Metal Gear Solid* was memorable for being, well, memorable, it's the boss battle against the gimpy Psycho Mantis that sticks in the mind. The wolves that peed on the cardboard box, the cigarette smoke warning you about nearby lasers, the Codec frequency on the back of the box – everyone had their own special moment to take away from Hideo Kojima's PlayStation (and later remade for GameCube) stealth opus. Yet it's the fight against the mind-reading Psycho Mantis and the unusual tactics required to defeat him that remain *Metal Gear Solid*'s most enduring episode.

The battle began when you followed Meryl into the study and she started acting… strangely. "Do you want to make love to me, Snake?" she asked, staggering forward in a hypnotic trance. You had to keep her alive, so the only option you had was knocking her out. After that, Psycho Mantis took over and reeled off a list of stats. So far, so usual.

Then Psycho Mantis started telling you what other games you'd been playing. It was a shock to hear a videogame character tell you that you'd been playing *ISS Pro '98* but that's exactly what this mind-reading boss did. It was little more than Psycho Mantis reading a list of Konami games on your memory card but it was damn creepy all the time.

He then told you to place your controller on a flat surface. That done, he moved the pad using his mind. Some players jumped out of their seat, some immediately knew it was merely the DualShock vibrating on cue, most missed out altogether by believing Mantis' instructions to be a cheap trick and refused to let go of the pad. The GameCube remake added even more little touches, such as the laughing Kojima picture on one of the study's walls (as shown in the screenshots on this page).

That would have been enough to ensure Psycho Mantis had his place reserved in the videogames Hall of Fame but the best was yet to come. When the actual fighting started, it was almost impossible to hit Mantis. He'd move out of the way of all your attacks and gunfire while flinging the study furniture at you using his mind powers. "I can read your mind!" he would shout, taunting you.

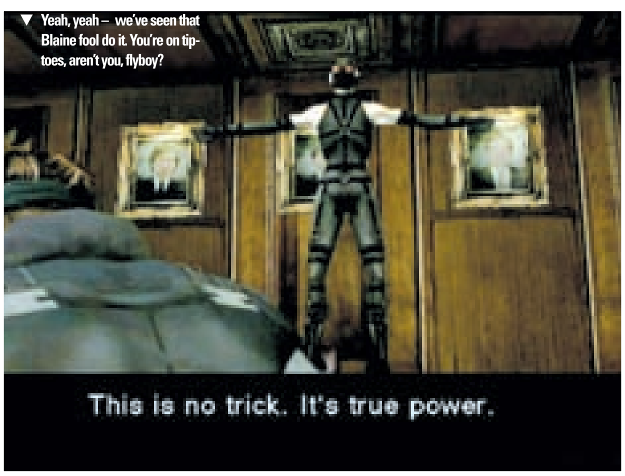
Just how the hell did you beat him? Easy – when the screen turned black and 'HIDEO' appeared in the corner, you had to switch pad ports. Mantis couldn't get a reading on you and you could start hitting him with your trusty FAMAS. If figuring out the solution was pleasing enough, Mantis' frustrated cries as he realised he couldn't read your mind any more were truly satisfying.

In desperation, Psycho Mantis revived Meryl and had her attack you. You had to knock her out again but when she next woke up, Psycho Mantis ordered her to use her pistol to shoot herself. You had to move quickly to prevent Meryl's 'suicide' and knock her out again. The battle shifted from a straight one-on-one fight to preventing Meryl's death as well as keeping the pressure on Mantis – another boss pattern to consider as if the fight hadn't taken enough unexpected U-turns already.

Eventually, Psycho Mantis fell and gave his final soliloquy before showing you the hidden door that allowed Solid Snake to continue. You just had to remember to plug the pad back into the first control port before pushing onward…



▼ Psycho Mantis was a ruthless host of Ann Summers parties.



▼ Yeah, yeah – we've seen that Blaine fool do it. You're on tip-toes, aren't you, flyboy?

TIME TO DIE

One aspect that is often overlooked in the technical pad-swapping awe is the calm that follows the battle. As Psycho Mantis removes his mask and shows his scarred face without eyes or a nose, he bonds with Snake because they have past traumas they don't like to revisit. When he says he only went along with Liquid Snake's plans to kill as many people as possible, Snake stops Meryl from hitting him in anger. It was an unusual moment in an unusual boss battle – the main protagonist seeing eye-to-eye with someone who finds redemption just before death. Saying this scene echoes *Blade Runner*'s classic rooftop moment with Rutger Hauer would probably be giving it too much credit but it's still a cute tribute to Ridley Scott's sci-fi classic.

B•A•R•B•A•R•I•A•N

Great RETRO Gaming Moments

OFF WITH HIS HEAD

***B**arbarian* **really struck a chord with us when it was released in 1987.** Not only was it a competent one-on-one fighter with excellent animation and a variety of increasingly difficult opponents, it also had one of the goriest ending moves we've ever seen at the time.

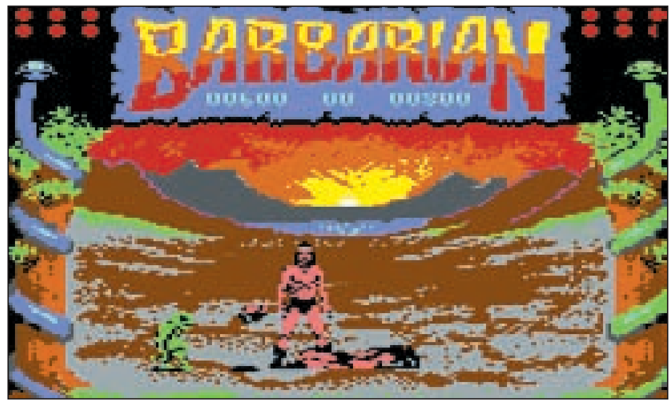
Picture the scene: two strapping barbarians enter the arena and prepare for battle. Using a variety of button presses and joystick combos, you're able to execute a dizzying array of special moves with your huge broadsword. Rolling into your opponent, you rise to your feet and kick him squarely in the face. While the poor fool is still stunned you deliver a devastating overhead chop and follow it up with a sharp swing to his midriff.

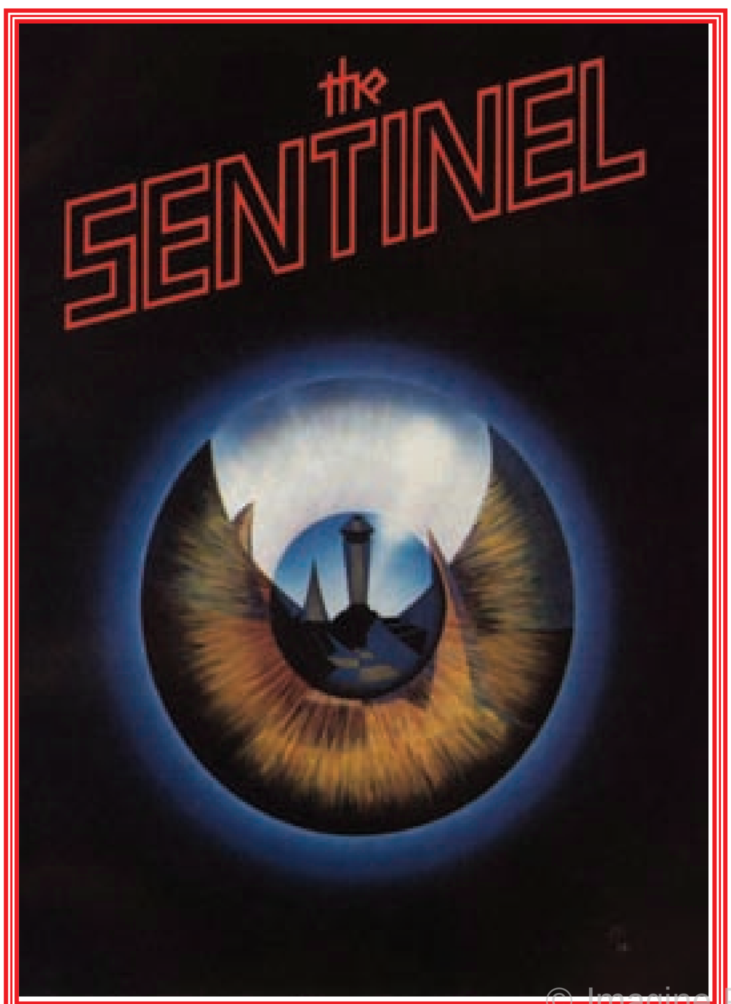
Release: 1987
Format: Various
Publisher: Palace Software
Developer: In-House

Knowing you have the offensive, you roll into your hapless foe and knock him to his feet a second time, then savagely headbutt him as he staggers onto his weakened legs. The end is near and you prepare for your deadliest move; turning full circle, you slice your opponent's head clean from his neck. A fountain of blood gushes from the lifeless body and it slumps to the floor.

His humiliation isn't complete, though. A goblin makes his way into the arena, unceremoniously kicks the severed head across the floor then drags off the bleeding body while you raise your sword in triumph. Ace.







THE SENTINEL (Various Home Systems) Firebird, 1986 – Original UK Box Art



An interview with... BEN DAGLISH

COMPOSER AND MULTI-INSTRUMENTALIST BEN DAGLISH REALLY KNEW HOW TO MAKE THE SID CHIP SING. WE CAUGHT UP WITH THE MUSIC MAN TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE GLORY DAYS OF COMMODORE COMPOSITION...

Not many people can claim to be musical legends before they're 40 – some people don't even manage it while they're alive – but Ben Daglish is a hero to many retro gamers, particularly fans of the Commodore 64. Though he wrote tunes for several 8- and 16-bit systems, it's his work on the C64 that brought him fame in the early Eighties – *Trap*, *The Last Ninja*, *Thing Bounces Back* and *Auf Wiedersehen Monty* are all superb showcases for his work.

Initially working as a freelancer, Daglish joined Gremlin Graphics before becoming increasingly disillusioned with the games industry and moving into writing music for the theatre – something he still does today. Though he says he doesn't wish to return to the world of videogaming, Daglish still performs his game soundtracks at retro gaming events – including Back In Time and this year's CGE UK – with other Commodore music wizards.

We managed to track down Daglish in the Peak District, where he lives with his wife and two children, to ask about the intricacies of composing for the C64…



▲ "If you've got it, flautist" – Ben Daglish goes woodwind crazy at the C64 music event of 2002, the Back In Time concert.





▲ Could anyone have predicted that *The Last Ninja* would be as popular as it was? Not even the creators thought that'd be the case…

The interview

Retro: How did you start writing music for computer games?
Ben Daglish: It was when I was asked by Tony Crowther, a school friend, to write out the notes for 'The Death March' on one of his games. After that I moved on to ripping off Jean-Michel Jarre…

R: You're primarily known for your C64 music and are considered by many as a pioneer in that field. Does that feel good?
BD: Absolutely great, if I'm totally honest. It was a very exciting period and I was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time. The best thing about it, though, is receiving mails today from other musicians to whom I was an inspiration – something I can point out when I'm eventually quizzed at the Pearly Gates.

R: Did you like your time in the industry? Trade shows must have been fun.
BD: Indeed – it was great fun strolling (well, very often stumbling, the state we were in) around with Tony, Jeff [Minter] and the rest of the gang. I'm still amused about being constantly hounded for autographs.

R: What was so satisfying about creating music on the C64 and how did it compare to the other 8-bit machines?
BD: The SID chip made all the difference. Nothing else even came close in terms of the sounds it was able to produce – it was the first 'home synthesiser'. It was always such a disappointment to have to do the AY8912 downgrade-conversion for the Amstrad, Spectrum 128, ST and so on.

R: Would you play games in order to get a 'feel' for them before composing?
BD: I probably managed to play around half of them. The other half were just based on a simple verbal description over the phone – "It's a shoot-'em-up with 10 levels" – and I'd just get on with it.

R: Who were your inspirations and why did you often work by yourself?
BD: Rob [Hubbard] was the obvious C64 inspiration – hearing some of the sounds that he pulled out of the SID chip spurred many of us on to constantly rewrite our sound routines. Musically though, it was Beethoven, Fairport Convention and Weather Report – a mixed bag if ever there was one. Jean-Michel Jarre was the biggest 'synthy' composer at the time, so a lot of his work rubbed off on me as well. I didn't really ever feel the need to work with anyone else though. To quote the great Ronnie Hazlehurst, "Never become an arranger – you'll turn into a hermit". So true…

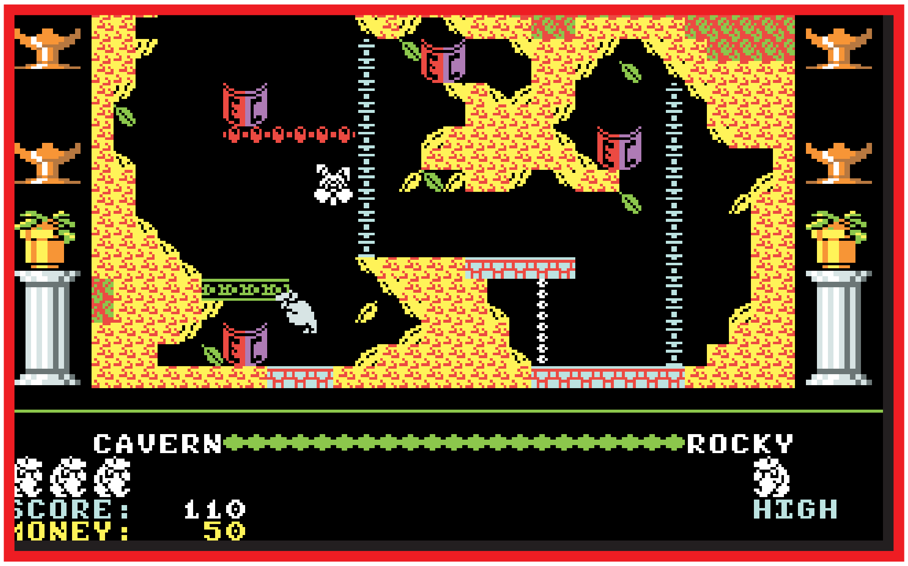
R: Did you enjoy collaborating with Rob Hubbard on *Auf Wiedersehen Monty*?
BD: It was marvellous fun. Rob had written the original *Monty* music, and although I was the in-house composer for Gremlin at the time we thought it would be nice to invite him along to write on the sequel as well. We basically spent two days in my studio getting stoned and

FINDING THE MUSE

Over the years, eager gamers have always wondered where Daglish found the inspiration for his music, especially with regards to titles like *The Last Ninja*. As Daglish explains, though, the answer often disappoints them, as the whole process is difficult to explain. "To be honest, the 'inspiration' thing is impossible – it really is like asking a writer 'Where do you get your ideas?'," he says. "I look, I think, I hum, then out it comes. I've no idea where it actually comes from; it's just there. The same applies for the actual composing process – I just write notes until it sounds right and I'm happy with the final product.

"Most of the time, I just sat in a room and wrote the tunes – not a lot more to it than that. Any memorable ones [for me] usually aren't the most memorable as far as the audience are concerned – I had no idea, for instance, with *The Last Ninja* when I was writing it that it would take off in the way that it did. If the process was memorable, it's usually because it was a hard one, or because something completely unrelated happened to spur the memory."

"I'M STILL AMUSED ABOUT BEING HOUNDED FOR AUTOGRAPHS"



▲ Surreal game, even more surreal music – some of the tunes accompanying Monty's adventures still bring back memories today.

An interview with…

jamming, then Rob hid in a corner with his super-secret-player-code and programmed all the notes in.

R: Did it take very long to compose your music?

BD: To be honest, the composition side was usually very quick – I'd whistle or scribble away for a couple of hours, then spend a few days actually doing the arranging and programming.

R: Were there ever projects you weren't satisfied with?

BD: Many, I'm sure – some tunes were knocked off and shipped out in less than a day so they could have easily been improved. Don't expect me to start remembering names, though – it was all a very long time ago.

"I DIDN'T REALLY ENJOY RUNNING A COMPANY – I'M A HIPPY NOT A BUSINESSMAN"

R: How did you find the transition to the 16-bit computers?

BD: I just turned around and there they were… Actually, the only one worthy of mention was the Amiga – the ST just had the same bog-standard Yamaha AY chip as everything else (although I did use it for sequencing). Writing for the Amiga was okay, but it was never as much 'fun' as for the C64 because it was just too easy – sample the sound you wanted, then slap it in – there was just nothing to it.

R: Why did you and Tony Crowther decide to set up W.E.M.U.S.I.C. (We Make Use Of Sound In Computers) and what do you feel was the company's high point?

BD: We set it up purely to market the music we were doing – Tony wrote the players, and I did the dots. Our high point was probably the collaborative aspect – although Tony wasn't really a composer at the time (though he subsequently wrote some nice stuff), he was a great critic with a good ear, and spurred me on.

R: How did you find running your own company?

BD: To be honest, I've never really enjoyed it – I'm a hippy, not a businessman.

R: And why did you and Tony decide to part ways?

BD: It was a combination of things. The player routine had got quite stable so I was pretty much writing on my own by then while Tony concentrated on writing games, and then I got offered the full-time post with Gremlin, leaving no time for freelance work.

R: Tell us a little more about joining Gremlin Graphics.

BD: Tony was one of the original founders of Gremlin Graphics, and so I started working with them on a freelance basis at first. He eventually 'moved on' (there's a long story there which isn't mine to tell, but suffice to say I was extremely surprised to find that Gremlin are often used as a model in university business courses), but I carried on writing for them, especially as they were based, as was I, in Sheffield.

R: How did you find the transition from freelancer to working in-house with Gremlin?

BD: Quite bizarre, actually – writing music nine to



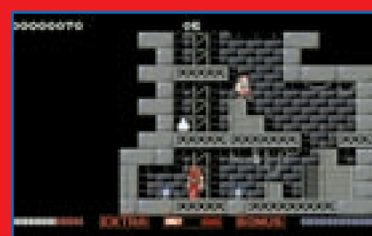


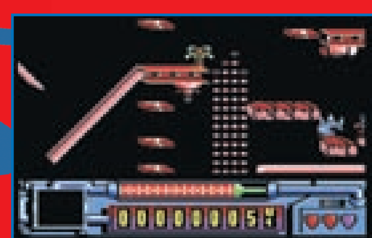


SOFTOGRAPHY

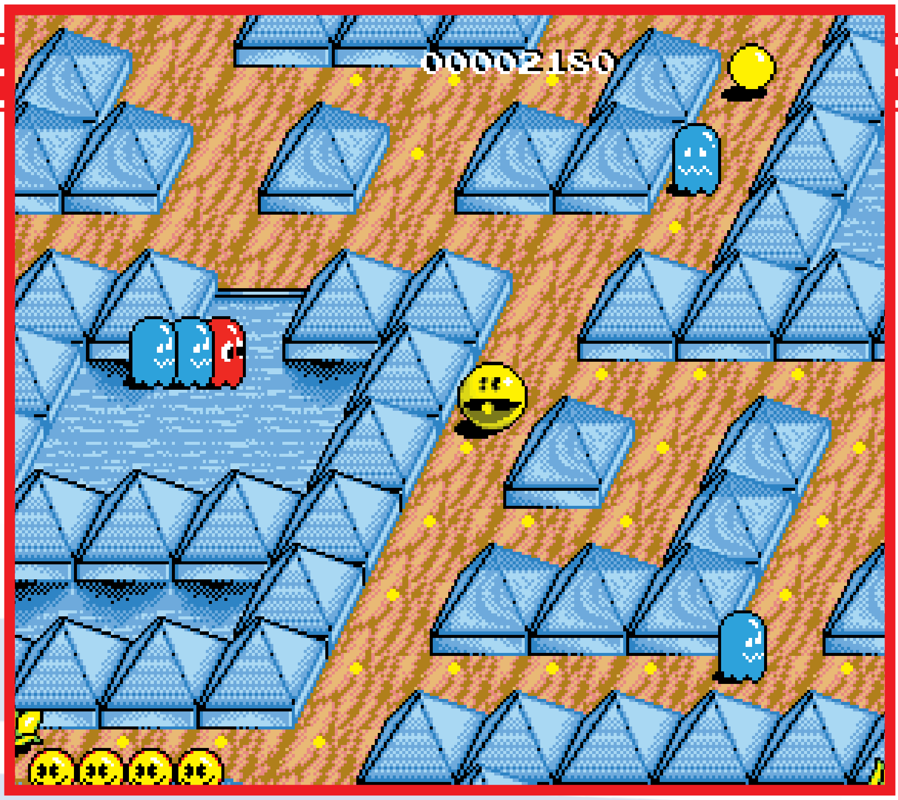
While the talented Mr Daglish has worked on a vast number of different formats and titles – way too many to list here – he's best remembered for his Commodore 64 tunes. With this in mind, here's our top 20 Daglish C64 soundtracks. Don't agree with us? Write and let us know…

Auf Wiedersehen Monty	1987	Gremlin Graphics
Avenger	1987	Gremlin Graphics
Blasteroids	1989	Image Works
Bobby Bearing	1986	The Edge
Chubby Gristle	1988	Grandslam
Cobra	1986	Ocean
Death Wish III	1987	Gremlin Graphics
Deflektor	1987	Gremlin Graphics
Gauntlet	1986	US Gold
H.A.T.E.	1989	Gremlin Graphics
Jack The Nipper	1987	Gremlin Graphics
Krakout	1987	Gremlin Graphics
The Last Ninja	1987	System 3
Pac-Mania	1988	Grandslam
SkateRock	1986	Bubble Bus
Super Cars	1991	Gremlin Graphics
Switchblade	1991	Gremlin Graphics
Thing Bounces Back	1987	Gremlin Graphics
Trap	1986	Alligata Software
Way Of The Tiger	1986	Gremlin Graphics









▲ The idea of *Pac-Man* in more than two dimensions might have seemed like heresy to some, but you can't deny the genius of the music.

five came as quite a shock. The money was nice, and so were the toys they bought for me, but to be honest it was the beginning of the end.

R: What prompted your decision to leave the games industry?

BD: I left when it became 'just another industry'. When I started, it was 14-year-olds writing games in their bedrooms for the fun of it. By the time I left, it had become shits-in-suits wandering around talking about 'shipping boxes' with no idea of actually what was in them – the products were a logo and a marketing concept as far as they were concerned.

R: Even today your music has a massive following and remains extremely popular. How do you feel about this?

BD: Mixed. It's strange listening back now to things that I wrote 20 years ago, having (I hope) progressed musically, but they're still recognisable as being mine. The remix scene now is great – some pieces are now sounding how I originally envisioned them in the scribbly-composey stage, before I had to cut them down to just three voices. It's marvellous that people are still listening to them, and there are still many tunes that I'm proud of, having obviously passed a 20-year 'old grey whistle test'.

R: You mentioned the remix scene – any particular favourites?

BD: The remix scene is great – I only wish that they sold more so that I could get some royalties in. My favourite is Reyn Ouwehand's *Deflektor* – that's basically the arrangement we play in SID80s [Stuck In D'80s, a live band formed by Daglish, Mark Knight, Marcel Donné, Reyn Ouwehand and Andreas Wallstrom].

R: How did the Back In Time concerts come about?

BD: It's all down to Chris Abbott, hero of this parish. Chris publishes my work (as well as Rob's, Dave Whittaker's and just about everybody else you've ever heard of), and he was determined to get us out of the house and in front of the public.

R: How has the reception been and are there plans to play this year?

BD: The reception has been marvellous – you can judge for yourself when the DVD eventually comes out. It's having a bit of a break at the moment – it's very difficult to pull off financially, but myself, Mark Knight (madfiddler) and maybe Jon Hare are doing a few gigs this year at assorted retro conventions around the country and we're definitely attending this year's CGE UK.



R: You're obviously a talented musician; how many instruments can you play?

BD: I wouldn't really like to give a number – it's a lot, though. I started on whistle and harmonica when I was about five or six, did cornet for a while and then played oboe up to about grade five or six. I then moved onto orchestral percussion (my main study for many years), which obviously included stuff like timpani and xylophone. I'm currently playing a lot of guitar, flute, whistle, piano and (I think my favourite, believe it or not) WX5 wind-controller. I probably own upwards of 50 different types of instruments (30-odd whistles alone), ranging from sitar to accordian and ocarina, and on occasion have a tinkle on them all (not, I hasten to add, all at the same time, though Roy Castle's record is one that I intend to go for at some point).

R: You now write music for plays, which is a world away from the videogames industry. How did this change come about?

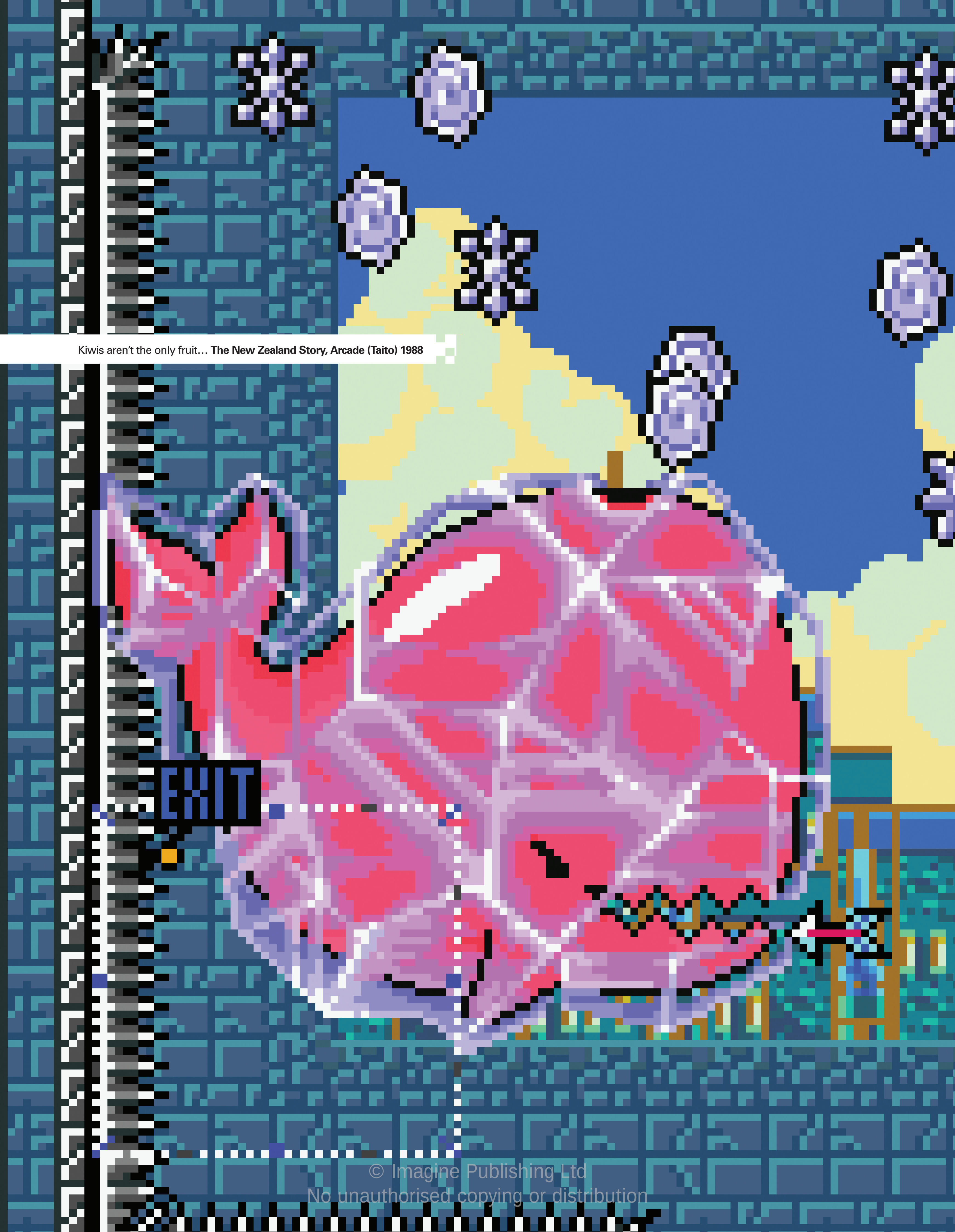
BD: It was due to my ex-partner, who is a theatre director, and she got me to write for some of her productions. Friends of hers liked my work, asked me to do more, and it simply grew from there.

R: How do you like to spend your spare time?

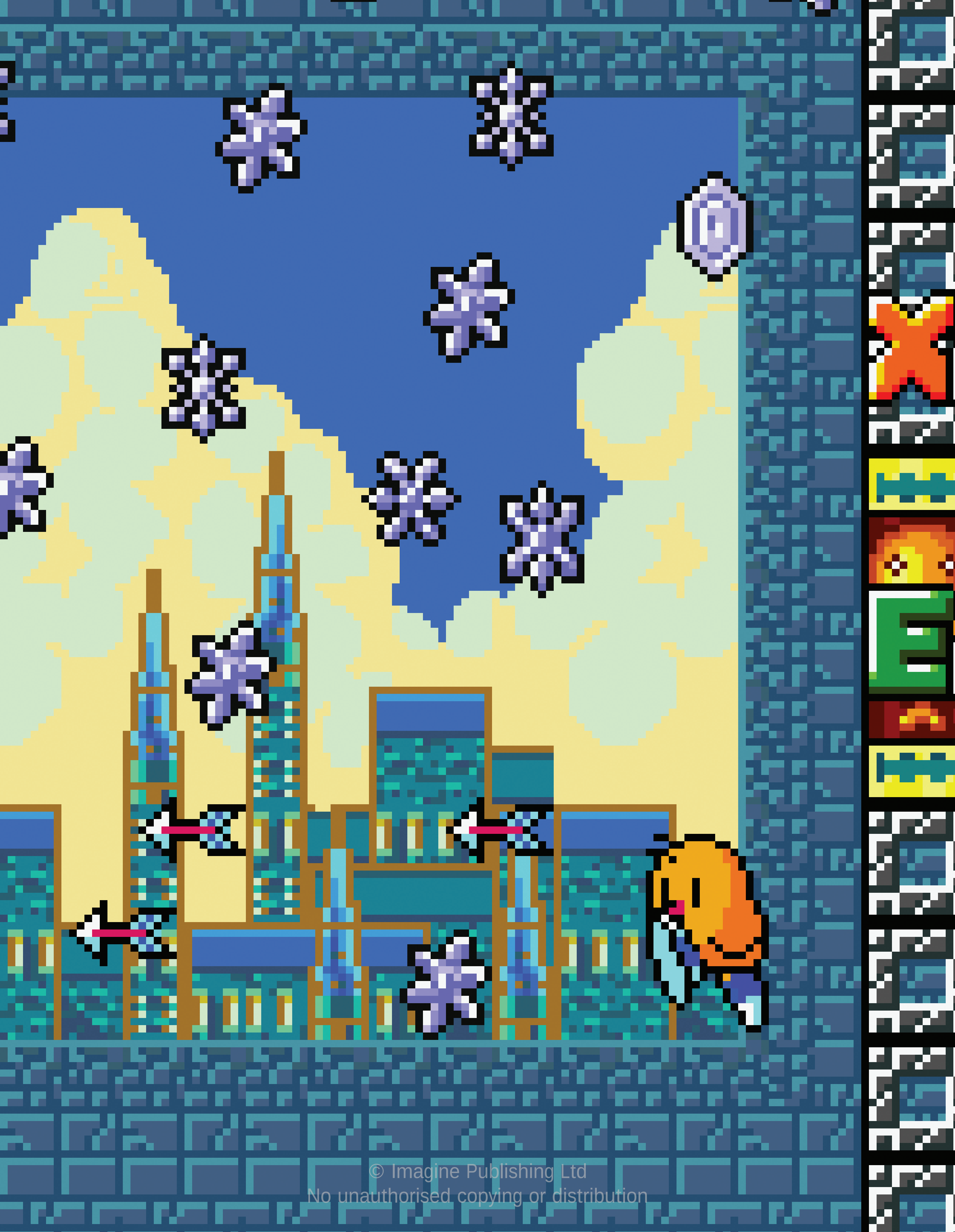
BD: Reading, writing, playing in various bands, jazzing, smoking, surfing (internet, not water) and playing Ultimate Frisbee. Luckily, I've managed to interest the kids in much the same, so I'm not being neglectful.

R: What are your plans for the future?

BD: I'm the worst planner in the world, so I really try not to think about it. Things seem to just crop up, and I'm just happy to go along with the flow…



Kiwis aren't the only fruit… **The New Zealand Story, Arcade (Taito) 1988**





RETRO GOES TO THE MOVIES

The popcorn's popping, we've got a super-sized Coke to see us through the night and our trigger finger's itching to play some games…

Loathe 'em or, well, loathe 'em, film licences have been a staple of the videogame market for what feels like an eternity. The draw of playing your favourite big-screen hero has always had a certain allure, and developers have been quick to act on it. When we were at school, there were often arguments about who got to play Han Solo or James Bond, so being able to actually 'be' them on your TV screen is a strong selling point for games – even if they're not all that good.

The majority of movie licences have been complete turkeys and for every classic like *GoldenEye* or *Star Wars*, you'll have five or six duds that go by the name of *Predator*, *Cobra* or *Mission: Impossible*.

It seems that many publishers seem content to see their games rest on the laurels of whatever licence they're based on, or perhaps the vast amount of money spent on securing the licence in the first place means that there's little left to go towards actual game development.

In our minds, film licences work best when the game expands on the existing ethos of the film, rather than when it's turned into just another generic shoot-and-kick action adventure. It's a stumbling block that far too many developers fall foul of and is perfectly illustrated by the amount of average film licences that Ocean churned out in the mid-Eighties and early Nineties. Despite producing a few gems, many of its film licences were generic in the extreme and were often identical in layout to some of its previous games.

Fortunately though, there are plenty of great retro film licences out there and it's these that we'll be honouring over the next four pages. And then, after that, we take a look at the worst…





▲ Movie licences have traditionally struck an unhappy medium – too bad for film fans, too bad for gamers. But there are a few exceptions. A few…

GOLDENEYE

Developer: Rare
Format: N64
Release: 1997

This is without a doubt the finest film licence we've ever played. While it hasn't aged particularly well, Rare's *GoldenEye* not only showed us how a film licence should be used in a game, but set the benchmark by which all future first-person shooters were judged (at least until *Halo* came along).

James Bond has always been a popular videogame character but this was the first time that you actually felt like you were playing the debonair spy – Rare had used every trick in the book to ensure that your experience was as realistic as possible. Watch the first few scenes from the film and it's amazing how well they were been captured on the trusty N64. Each level felt instantly familiar and you soon became immersed in the game's excellent atmosphere.

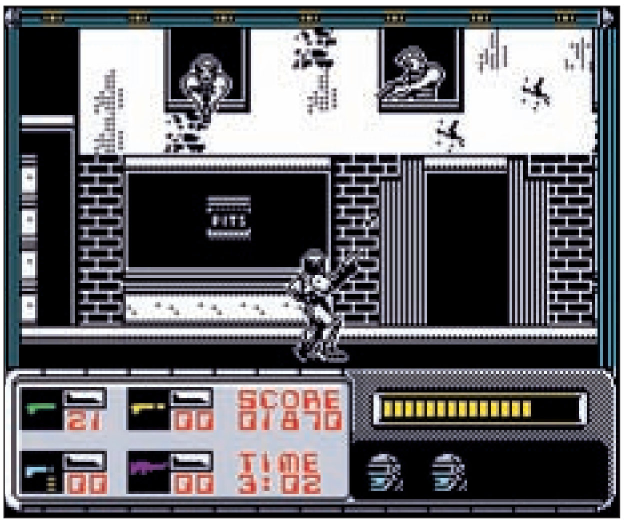
The great thing about *GoldenEye*, though, is that it would have still been a fantastic game without the Bond licence. A masterful control system, fantastic selection of weapons and plenty of varied missions ensured that nothing could touch it in the single-player stakes. However, it was the multiplayer mode that really grabbed the public's attention and for many *GoldenEye* remains a classic if you're a Bond fan or not.



▲ With all its connotations of 'being' James Bond, *GoldenEye* was a great use of a licence. And the game itself was pretty awesome too, which is a bonus.

ROBOCOP

Developer: Ocean
Format: Various Home Systems
Release: 1989



Ocean's film licences always worked best when they strayed away from the simple 'walk along a level and shoot everything that moves' design and *Robocop* was a perfect example. It may have still had the scrolling levels that had become Ocean's trademark, but the production values had been suitably enhanced.

For one thing the game looked lovely, with the 8-bit titles being particularly impressive. All versions featured chunky, well-animated sprites and plenty of detail that captured the style of the film. While the Spectrum version lacked the colour of its 8-bit peers, it's easily one of the strongest looking licences that the humble Speccy has ever produced. Audio was also of a very high quality with all versions of the game featuring a great haunting tune and (when applicable) some above-average digitised speech.

No doubt aware of the criticism past titles had received, Ocean added plenty of variety to ensure that your brain as well as your trigger finger was suitably taxed. Our favourite section saw you trying to piece together Clarence Boddiker's features from a selection of face parts, but all mini-games were a welcome break from the run-and-gun action.

DIE HARD TRILOGY

Developer: Probe Entertainment
Format: Saturn/PSone
Release: 1996

Back when *Die Hard Trilogy* came out for the PSone, the idea of having multiple genres of gameplay in a single game was a pretty new concept, which is why this title was so different from every other film-licensed game. Being split into three distinct sections, one representing each of the movies, meant that the game offered three very different experiences, some of which were more enjoyable than others.

The weakest of the three was certainly the third-person shoot-'em-up based on the first film; starting on the ground floor of the Nakatomi Plaza, you had to work your way up through the building shooting terrorists, saving hostages and defusing bombs. It wasn't unenjoyable – just a bit simple. As you moved onto the other sections, though, the quality improved.

The second film had been transformed into a lightgun blaster similar to *Virtua Cop*, with numerous locations taken from the movie; not only did you have to blast the terrorists without killing innocent people, but you could also destroy the scenery in the process.

However, it was the free-roaming driving sections based upon the third film that really stole the show and offered some superbly exciting gameplay as you sped around, trying to defuse various bombs along the way.



Alone, each game would have been a fair example of a film-to-game conversion, but together they made for an extremely strong and varied package.

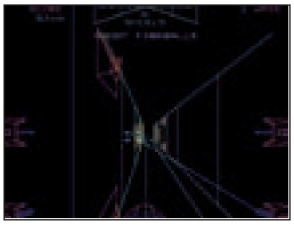
STAR WARS

Developer: Atari
Format: Arcade
Release: 1983

George Lucas's *Star Wars* films have received more videogame conversions than any other film licence. Some, like *Knights Of The Old Republic*, *X-Wing* and *Super Star Wars*, have been superb, while the likes of *Rebel Assault* and *Masters Of Teräs Käsi* have smelled worse than a pile of Banther poodoo. For the moment, though, we're going to focus on Atari's wireframe classic that hit the arcades in 1983.

Available in both stand-up and sit-down versions, *Star Wars* saw you playing as Luke Skywalker and re-enacted the classic assault on the Death Star. Thanks to the timeless soundtrack and massive amounts of speech, you were quickly thrown into the *Star Wars* universe and soon became utterly engrossed in the simple yet addictive gameplay. The first wave of the game saw you trying to take down as many TIE Fighters as possible, while the second stage saw your taking out various blocks and towers on the surface of the Death Star.

Eventually, you got to fly down the vital trench itself, dodging fireballs and hastily constructed barriers until you were able to finally blow up the Death Star and start the whole process again. Fantastic.



▲ What's the betting George Lucas wants to replace this with a 'special' edition too?

GHOSTBUSTERS

Developer: Activision
Format: Various Home Systems
Release: 1984



First released on the Commodore 64 and featuring a great rendition of Ray Parker Jr's theme tune, *Ghostbusters* is another great movie licence that ate up way too much of our free time.

Starting off with $10,000 your first task was to kit out your Ectomobile with ghost-detecting apparatus in order to make your job a bit easier. Once your vehicle was all tooled-up you could take to the streets of New York and start looking for those pesky spirits.

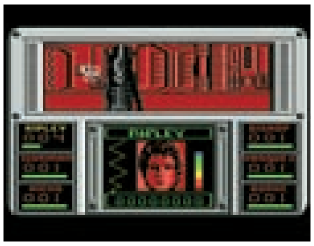
As you travelled around the city, red flashing lights indicated hidden ghosts and the screen would cut to a view above your car as you raced towards the stricken building. As you made your way around town, it was possible to suck up any stray ghosts to raise your credit rating.

Once you made it to the building, the game switched to a side-on view and saw you trying to trap the troublesome spook before he could escape. Your final goal was to make it to the Temple of Zuul and save the day – just watch out for that Sta-Puft Man.

It may have had rather ropey visuals, but *Ghostbusters* has an enduring quality that still makes it fun to play today.

ALIENS

Developer: Electric Dreams
Format: C64/Spectrum



Two *Aliens* games were released on the 8-bit formats, but the version by Electric Dreams was far superior and convincingly captured the terror of going up against one of cinema's most memorable monsters.

Taking control of six characters (including Ellen Ripley and Bishop the android) your aim was to infiltrate a complex set up by colonists to see if any of them were still alive. All the action was displayed via your Mobile Tactical Operations Bay and the viewing screen gave you a first-hand view of the character you were currently connected to. By using this first-person viewpoint, Electric Dreams created a tremendous amount of atmosphere that perfectly conveyed the tension and horror of the film.

A quick press of various keys enabled you to switch between all six characters and you were even able to give them (limited) commands that would be carried out as soon as you switched to another person. While the sound effects were rather limited, they were expertly used and generated huge amounts of tension, especially when an Alien was about to attack. A low hum would be your only warning that a Xenomorph was on the loose, and quick reactions and a steady trigger finger were needed in order to defeat them. Gripping stuff.

THE UNTOUCHABLES

Developer: Ocean
Format: Various Home Systems
Release: 1989

By far the most ambitious of Ocean's licensed games was *The Untouchables*. Based on the excellent Brian De Palma flick, *The Untouchables* included plenty of different gameplay elements to ensure that the player never got bored.

Starting off with a side-scrolling run-and-gun level that saw you madly dashing backwards and forwards through a vast warehouse in search of evidence, the levels just got better and better (we could even forgive it being a multi-loader).

While many of the stages were based around *Operation Wolf* or past Ocean licences, they were done with such style that you couldn't help but be impressed. Best of all was Ocean's masterful capturing of the best part of the movie – the excellent homage to the Odessa Steps sequence in *Battleship Potemkin* (you know, the bit with the, er, steps).

Taking control of Eliot Ness, you had to guide a runaway pram to safety while taking out as many bad guys as possible. Numerous health icons appeared throughout the sequence and you'd find yourself pushing the pram over them to ensure its passenger survived. It perfectly captured a great cinematic moment and is the crowning achievement of a top movie licence.



▲ "He sends one of yours to the hospital, you unplug his controller and stuff it down his neck."

BATMAN



Developer: Ocean
Format: Amiga
Release: 1989

Along with *Shadow Of The Beast*, Ocean's interpretation of Tim Burton's *Batman* was one of the first titles to convince gamers that an Amiga was really worth owning. Featuring amazing visuals and a barnstorming score, it looked like nothing else around and was poles apart from its C64 brother.

Although the platform levels were little more than enhanced versions of those seen on the Commodore 64, it was the superb driving sections that really wowed gamers and convinced them that the Amiga was the must-have gaming system.

Taking control of either the Batmobile or the Batwing, the game saw you flying through the streets (and later the skies) of Gotham at ridiculously high speeds that made your jaw drop. Should a turn prove too difficult to take in the Batmobile, you could fire out a hook and attach it to a nearby lamppost, thus making the bend easier to negotiate.

Add in a puzzle game that was very similar to the old boardgame version of *Mastermind* and it was quite clear that Ocean had left no stone unturned to deliver the definitive home licence. Ocean may be responsible for churning out some of the most generic pap imaginable, but when it wanted to, it could deliver some real classics. *Batman* was one such game.

ALIEN^3

Developer: Probe Software
Format: SNES
Release: 1993

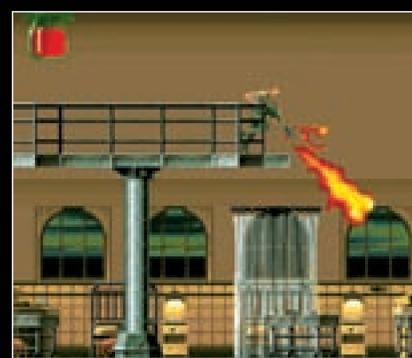
Although *Alien*^{3} appeared on various formats including the Mega Drive and the Commodore 64, it's the great SNES version that's made it into our top ten.

Where its peers were simple (but admittedly very good) run-and-gun clones, the SNES outing offered brains as well as brawns. Ripley had a massive amount of tasks to complete, which added plenty of variety and ensured massive longevity over the pretty but rather limited Mega Drive conversion.

Rescuing captured prisoners, sealing off overrun areas and fixing broken pipes were just a few of the challenges you had to face and they added variety to an already solid game. To make your tasks more difficult the prison was infested with an incredible amount of Xenomorphs. Needless to say, great care had to be taken to ensure you didn't meet a sticky end.

Fortunately, Ripley had a large amount of weapons to choose from (whereas in the film she only had her frightening bald head) but our favourite was definitely the flamethrower – mmm, toasted Alien… Although Probe could be criticised for moving away from the spirit of the film, gamers who were disappointed with the movie's single acidic-blooded foe at least had their hands full in the game.

Fantastic visuals and some incredibly creepy music finished off a great package and makes *Alien*^{3} well worth checking out.



▲ Ripley was impressed with new 'extra strength' Raid. Goodbye, troublesome bugs and aliens.

JURASSIC PARK



Developer: Ocean
Format: SNES/Amiga
Release: 1996

Like *Alien*^{3}, *Jurassic Park* was another title that was specifically tailored for each host machine. Forget about the woefully inept Mega Drive version that saw you controlling either Alan Grant or a Velociraptor, the SNES and Amiga versions were the titles to go for (although the Mega CD game was pretty good as well).

Taking control of Alan Grant, you had a huge variety of goals to meet and a park crawling with cloned dinosaurs to negotiate. Radioing for help, destroying Raptor nests and clearing a dinosaur-infested ship were just a few of the obstacles you had to overcome, and that was without worrying about the massive T-Rex that was on the loose…

While the top-down sections of the game were extremely detailed and well-animated, it was the first-person sections that really made *Jurassic Park* stand out from other film licences of the time. Upon entering the park's many buildings, the game took on a first-person perspective and saw you trying to hunt out guns, keys and even night vision goggles in a bid to reach safety. Avoid each building's Raptors and you could move on to unlock even more of the park. It might feel a little old hat now, but at the time nothing else came close.

SCRAPING THE BARREL

For every great film licence, the shelves are stacked with seven or eight complete duffers. Don't believe us? Walk into your local games emporium and see for yourself – it really is quite worrying. Sadly, it's something we've had to put up with for years, and the likes of *Van Helsing*, *The Scorpion King* and *Catwoman* are perfect proof that the situation isn't likely to change any time soon. We may be living in an age of fantastic visuals and superb sound, but the gameplay in many of today's licences is no more enjoyable than what we were force-fed 20 years ago. However, it's the past we're currently interested in, and as we've given you a selection of our favourites, let's look at some of the worst licences we could force ourselves to replay. We warn you, though, it's not going to be pretty…



▲ Don't look at this picture longer than you have to – you'll only encourage them. Go on, move along now.

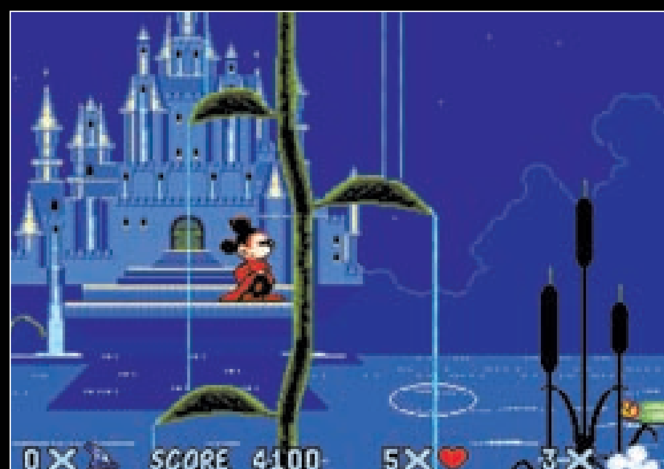
FANTASIA

Developer: Infogrames
Format: Mega Drive
Release: 1991

Mickey Mouse And The Castle Of Illusion was an instant classic when it appeared on the Mega Drive. Gorgeous visuals, great music and fantastic gameplay all combined to create an absolute gem. So what the hell happened with *Fantasia*?

While it had some lovely visuals the game had been saddled with horrendous music and some of the worst controls we've ever seen in a Mega Drive title. Mickey took ages to respond to your commands and collision detection throughout the game was disgraceful.

Perhaps the biggest problem with the game was its horrific rendition of the film's classical soundtrack. Kudos to Sega for remembering to use the relevant pieces of music, but the Mega Drive simply wasn't up to the task and delivered a series of offensive noises that no doubt had all the original composers spinning in their graves. *Fantasia* was a crushing disappointment and the perfect example of a poor film licence.



▲ All the Disney magic in the world couldn't stop *Fantasia* grinding to a halt on the Mega Drive.



A VIEW TO KILL

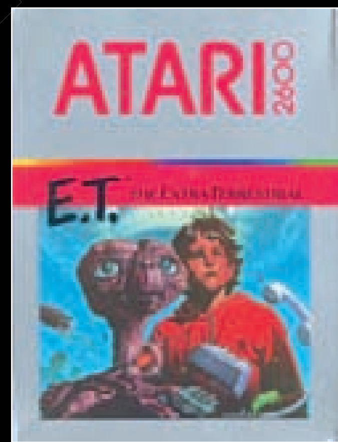
Developer: Domark
Format: Various
Release: 1985

Like the *Star Wars* licence, the James Bond franchise has also suffered from its own share of poor game titles and *A View To A Kill* is one of the worst examples.

While Domark attempted to keep the game fresh by giving it three distinct gameplay styles, they were all terribly tedious and lacked any excitement. There might have been plenty of variety – running through mines, driving cars through tight city streets – but the lack of gameplay totally ruined a potentially great title.

The first level was horribly bugged and it was possible to simply take a lift through the entire stage, eventually leaving the game area completely and subsequently dying as a result. The later stages didn't get any better and special mention has to go to the piss-poor car chase that saw your car bouncing off brick walls like it was made of rubber. It was incredibly easy to get stuck on corners or against other cars and it soon became obvious that this was yet another licence that was rushed out to cash in on the film's success.

ET: THE EXTRA TERRESTRIAL



Developer: Atari
Format: Atari 2600
Release: 1982

Although not the worst title ever released for the Atari 2600, we can safely say that this is one of the worst film licences we've ever had the misfortune to play.

Taking control of ET, you had to search out three missing items so that you could rebuild your phone and eventually return home. Along the way you had to avoid FBI agents and doctors, as well as the incredibly frustrating pits that were littered throughout the game.

The in-game graphics were extremely poor and it was clear that Atari had simply rushed the game out in order to meet its Christmas release date. But for all its shoddy visuals and ropey animation, it was the incredibly frustrating and unfair gameplay that proved the real killer.

There were a stupid amount of pits dotted around and the poor controls meant it was incredibly difficult to avoid falling into them. It wouldn't have been so bad if they were easy to climb out of, but Atari made it so frustrating that it was easier to turn the game off.

ET: The Extra Terrestrial was so bad that Atari was inundated with returns and eventually buried five million copies in a landfill in New Mexico. The film may have been enchanting, but the game was an absolute dog and thoroughly deserved its final resting place.



STREET FIGHTER: THE MOVIE

Developer: Capcom
Format: Various
Release: 1995

So, it's a game based upon a film that was based on a game…

Using digitised characters is never a good idea (just look at *Pit Fighter*) but the thought of beating up a digitised version of Jean Claude Van Damme is actually quite appealing. But Capcom dropped a real clanger with *Street Fighter: The Movie* and managed to produce a title that was nothing like the superior game that had been the inspiration for the film.

The biggest problems were with the characters; each was incredibly stilted and jerky and lacked the graceful animation of their *Street Fighter II* counterparts. As a result, the game has none of the polish that had made its predecessors such a joy to play and it inevitably started to collect dust on the shelves of those who thought they were buying a great game.

Although it first appeared in arcades, home conversions followed, but they were all as dire as the original. Granted, it was better on the Saturn (due to its joypad) but that wasn't enough to justify a purchase.

STAR WARS: MASTERS OF TERÄS KÄSI

Developer: LucasArts
Format: PlayStation
Release: 1998

With so many *Star Wars* titles released in the last 22 years, it's inevitable that there'll be a few stinkers. But nothing could prepare us for *Masters Of Teräs Käsi*.

The idea of a 3D fighter may have sounded good on paper, but its execution was a complete shambles and, along with *Super Bombad Racing*, it's one of the worst *Star Wars* games that we've played.

We won't lie that we weren't excited about playing the likes of Boba Fett, Darth Vader or Han Solo, but spending time with *Teräs Käsi* was another matter entirely. While the stages captured the film locations, the characters were poorly animated and looked very dated.

The biggest problem, though, was with how the game actually played. Battles felt like you were fighting against some invisible force (no pun intended) so games were sluggish and lacked any excitement.

We still feel there's room for a *Star Wars* beat-'em-up, but it clearly isn't *Masters Of Teräs Käsi*.



Rising Sun Retro

S·I·N A·N·D P·U·N·I·S·H·M·E·N·T: S·U·C·C·E·S·S·O·R T·O T·H·E E·A·R·T·H

For many, the advent of 16-bit consoles opened up a world of import gaming. One incentive was the ability to get hold of games that would never appear outside Japan. With this in mind, we'll be taking a look at the import classics that were never released in the UK. This month is another classic from Treasure, the superb Sin And Punishment…

Release: 2000
Format: N64
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Treasure

Considering it creates some of the most technically impressive games for whichever platform it chooses to work on, it's surprising that Treasure has never actually had a runaway hit. Take *Sin And Punishment* for example: here was a title with superlative visuals, wonderful gameplay mechanics and more vibrant explosions than an eruption in a paint factory. Yet for some bizarre reason this superb on-rails blaster absolutely bombed in Japan and the planned US release was quickly shelved (a doubly frustrating blow as it already came complete with a superb English language option).

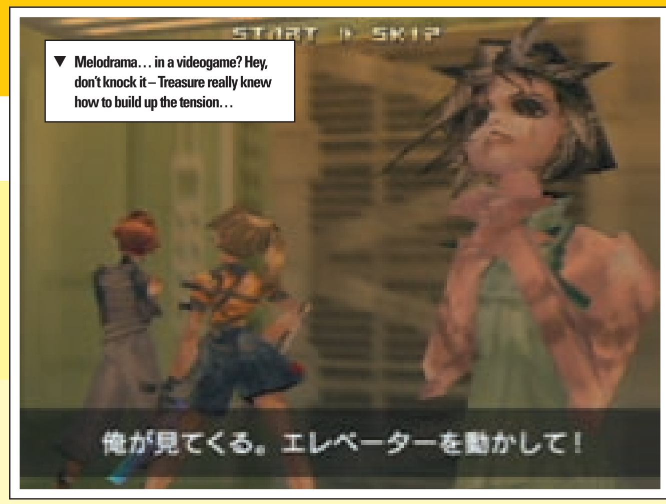
Set in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, *Sin And Punishment* was a graphical tour de force that left your gob well and truly smacked. Indeed, a recent airing in the games room had many staring wide-eyed in disbelief, as they struggled to comprehend how anything that spectacular could run on a humble N64. As it had done with countless other systems, Treasure used every trick in the book – and no doubt a few that weren't – to create a dazzling masterpiece that made Nintendo's 64-bit console sing with joy. A fact that's even more remarkable when you discover that this was the first fully 3D title that Treasure had worked on. Six years on and *Sin And Punishment* remains just as impressive as the first day we played it.

It may have suffered from rather poor textures and a low polygon count, but there was no denying the polish that Treasure added to its 3D masterpiece. The screen was constantly filled with hordes of enemies, while many of the bosses were gigantic, mechanical monstrosities blessed with wonderfully complex attack patterns and a devastating array of firepower, and all of this without a hint of slowdown. Set pieces appeared throughout *Sin And Punishment's* hour-long running timing and each encounter stayed with you forever. But perhaps the most outstanding moment of *Sin And Punishment* was when you took to the skies and participated in a spectacular aerial battle. Astride a flying craft, you swooped around the on-screen









▼ Melodrama… in a videogame? Hey, don't knock it – Treasure really knew how to build up the tension…

carnage while the N64's graphical abilities were pushed to the limit. Battleships spun crazily below you, jets roared overhead and lasers appeared to be firing at you from all directions. It's easily one of the N64's most exhilarating gaming moments and something we'd love to see replicated on the next generation of hardware. Add to this an electrifying score, decent voice acting – that puts most RPGs to shame – and a selection of boisterous spot effects, and it's little wonder that Treasure's shooter is still held in such high regard by anyone fortunate enough to have play it.

Of course, there has always been more to Treasure then jaw-dropping aesthetics, and *Sin And Punishment's* superb control mechanics were no exception. Easily adaptable for both left and right-handed players, the interface set-up was elegant to use, yet remarkably effective. The N64's analogue stick controlled your on-screen cursor, while character movement was mapped to the C-buttons and d-pad. Add the ability to jump or roll out of harm's way with a swift double-tap to the left or right and the end result was fantastic mobility with minimum effort. And when you considered the sheer amount of firepower that Treasure threw at you, you needed all the help you could get.

Luckily your character was equipped with a handy gun that also doubled as an incredibly lethal sword (which, in turn, could be swung rapidly to act as a temporary shield). If anything got past your intense firepower, a few swings of your melee weapon would normally be enough to defeat whatever was after you. The sword wasn't used as a simple gimmick either, as later bosses required you to use your sword alone (or a quick combination of both weapons would eventually defeat them). One notable moment in the game saw you climbing to the top of a massive building and slashing at the bull-like boss who resided there. Time your strokes correctly and it was possible to topple him from his lofty perch. Another occasion saw you using your blade to deflect the many dead bodies that a female psychic hurled at you. Best of all, though, is a proper sword fight – all clashing blades and grim expressions – that eventually resulted in your opponent getting hurled through a huge window. Whether you used sword or gun, though, your enemy's resources seemed limitless and constantly bombarded you with one amazing boss after the other.

Indeed, by the end of the first level even a fairly skilled player would have amassed close to 200 kills and the death count just kept rising. Every 100 kills earned you a stack of bonus points and an extra continue, while defeating certain enemies – normally the game's many bosses – rewarded you with yellow gems which again could be amassed for huge bonuses. It may have lacked the complexity of scoring systems that were seen in such titles as in *Radiant Silvergun* or *Ikaruga*, but the end result was no less enjoyable. Cynics may well scoff and describe *Sin And Punishment* as little more than a shallow, on-rails shooter, but those that do are missing the point entirely. *Sin And Punishment* is just as much an experience as it is a game and is a title that no self-respecting gamer should be without. It demands your utmost reflexes, tests your skills to their limit, and will leave you gasping in utter amazement. It can change hands for as much as £60 nowadays but in our opinions it worth every penny. What a shame it is that most PAL gamers won't have even heard of it…



TWO'S COMPANY?

Treasure doesn't get it right all the time…

While *Sin And Punishment* comes equipped with a two-player option, it was a bit of a wasted opportunity and something that we rarely bothered with. Rather than have two characters race co-operatively throughout each glorious-looking stage, Treasure instead opted for one character to be controlled by both players. One person took care of all the hectic shooting – easily the most enjoyable aspect of the partnership – while the other was forced to avoid the carnage. It was certainly a novel idea, but it didn't really work, as it required a ridiculous amount of co-operation for what was an already intense game.

CLASH OF THE TITANS

R.O.A.D.B.L.A.S.T.E.R.S



As gaming infiltrated the home market a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre, machine or even developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all that opposed him. First recorded in playgrounds in the early Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine, or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month, we take the 8-bit computer versions of *RoadBlasters* for a test drive.

ROUND 1: VISUALS

COMMODORE 64: The C64 visuals are nice and chunky and make a brave attempt at capturing the spirit of the original arcade game; the layered roadside makes a reasonable attempt at conveying the death-defying speeds of the arcade original, but it still lacks any adrenaline rush. It's a decent enough conversion, but we've seen better.

SPECTRUM: While the Spectrum's visuals are extremely detailed and look reasonably close to their arcade counterparts, the monochromatic display brings the whole package down. But the biggest fault with the Spectrum version is its lack of speed and, as a result, one of the key aspects that made the arcade game so much fun has been lost.

AMSTRAD: Previous driving games on the CPC 464 have suffered a distinct lack of speed that undermines the whole point of a racing title. Luckily, *RoadBlasters* looks extremely slick. Add some bright, well-detailed visuals that capture the game's arcade parent and the Amstrad takes an early lead.

WINNER: AMSTRAD
RUNNER UP: C64

ROUND 2: AUDIO

COMMODORE 64: Although not the best score David Whittaker has coded, it's surprisingly upbeat, features plenty of bass and perfectly complements the game. However, the in-game effects are quite harsh on the ears and the lack of any music to listen to while racing is disappointing. Still, a sterling effort.

SPECTRUM: While the 128k version of *RoadBlasters* has the same soundtrack as the C64 and CPC 464 versions, it sounds a lot tinnier. As bad as the soundtrack may be, though, nothing prepares you for the horror that greets your ears when you play the game… The constant engine drone is horrific and the spot effects aren't any better either.

AMSTRAD: Although this sounds much better than the Spectrum's woeful effort, it can't match the thumping bass that the C64 version offers. Spot effects are surprisingly solid and even the continuous engine noise doesn't grate too much.

WINNER: C64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

COMMODORE 64: An absolute shambles. Your car slides around like it's on an ice rink and the slightest of touches causes you to lurch all over the place. Collision detection is reasonably good, but the stodgy controls, over-sensitive steering and unfair difficulty level soon put a damper on things.

SPECTRUM: Controls are much tighter than the C64 version, so your car is much more responsive. Problems do arise when you take tight corners at high speed (the game practically slows to a crawl) but it's a problem that's in all three versions. Even the collision detection is very impressive, making the Spectrum a strong contender for first place.

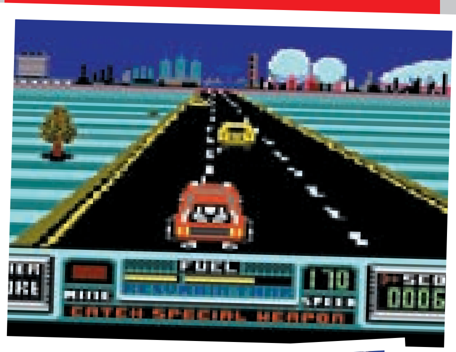
AMSTRAD: While the controls aren't as sensitive as those on the C64, they lack the tightness of the Spectrum conversion. Collision detection, while decent, is less fair than the Spectrum, but it's still reasonably playable.

WINNER: SPECTRUM
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

AND THE WINNER IS…

Amstrad

Like many titles of the time, it was always going to be tough converting *RoadBlasters* to the 8-bit formats, but US Gold had reasonable success with the Amstrad and Spectrum conversions. Although we wouldn't normally choose aesthetics over gameplay, the Amstrad version did feature in all three categories as either the winner or runner up, so it's a unanimous win for Alan Sugar's machine.



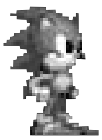




ROADBLASTERS (Various Home Systems) US Gold, 1988 – UK Advertisement

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG





We remember the blue hero who revolutionised Sega's Mega Drive

Format: Mega Drive
Release: 1991
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team

Rather like the 20th Century Fox fanfare at the beginning of a *Star Wars* movie, the word 'Sega' cheerfully booming from your TV signals the start of something pretty impressive: *Sonic The Hedgehog*. Yet the speedy blue hedgehog that became an icon for Sega was proof that necessity is the mother of invention.

In 1990 Sega was eager for a strong mascot to help drive Mega Drive sales and held an internal design competition at Sega Japan. After choosing a drawing by artist Maoto Oshima, Sega just needed someone to place the blue insectivore in a fantastic new game. Step forward Yuji Naka. Although the talented young game designer had already worked on several titles like *Space Harrier*, *Black Belt* and the *Phantasy Star* series, this was the first time he had headed his own production. Nevertheless, Hayao Nakayama (Sega's president at the time) was confident in Naka-san's abilities. Teaming up with artist Naoto Ohshima, Naka-san set to work on his new project.

When *Sonic The Hedgehog* was released in June 1991, it immediately became a huge success and was quite unlike anything else on the market (although a whole slew of imitators quickly followed). Mischievously wagging his finger at you from the game's title screen, Sega's spunky new hero really caught your attention and seemed a world away from Nintendo's podgy (and suddenly boring) plumber.

Blinding speed was on the blue hedgehog's side and once you'd built up your racing skills it was possible to sail through many of the levels in ridiculously fast times. The unique, abstract worlds simply flew past, and the exhilaration you felt as Sonic passed each checkpoint was unmatched by any other game of the time. Many levels were filled with elaborate loops and twisting tunnels that Sonic would speed through without a second's thought and it all looked simply amazing.

There was more to *Sonic The Hedgehog* than madly racing through levels, though, and your main objective in each zone was to free your animal friends and collect as many gold Rings as possible. The evil Dr Robotnik had stolen the powerful Chaos Emeralds and turned every animal in the game world into a robot; as a result Sonic had to race through six diverse zones (each containing three levels) to save his animal pals.

While even the slightest of brushes with an enemy or a spike would result in instant death, Sonic could prolong his life by collecting the Rings that were scattered throughout each level. Collecting 50 would open up a special bonus stage that Sonic needed to access in order to collect the coveted Chaos Emeralds (collect them all and you got a better ending for the game), while netting yourself a hundred would get you an extra life. Hit an enemy and you'd lose all your hard-earned Rings, although if you were quick it was possible to recapture many of them before they permanently disappeared.

Of course, Rings weren't the only items that the plucky hedgehog had access to and careful searching of each stage would uncover extra lives, more Rings, globes that protected you from a single hit and even invulnerability. Best of all, though, were the nifty red shoes you could



ZONED OUT

Each of *Sonic*'s levels were remarkably different from each other. Green Hill Zone saw the blue hedgehog racing through gorgeous tropical scenery; Marble Zone had Sonic speeding through ancient ruins that were filled with some extremely dangerous lava; while Spring Yard Zone was essentially a massive pinball table that required great patience to get through. Reach stage four and you suddenly found yourself in the gorgeous Labyrinth Zone – the majority of this stage took place under water and as Sonic couldn't swim he moved a lot slower. To stop him from drowning you had to seek out air bubbles so he could top up his limited air supply. Star Light Zone was littered with giant fans, self-destructing bombs and massive springboards and seriously started to increase the game's difficulty factor, while Scrap Brain Zone's many traps and enemies simply had us in tears.





▲ Sonic was fast but he didn't always travel to the places you wanted him to.



▲ The underwater levels were a bit of a pain – Sonic moved much more slowly and you had to remember to top up your air supply or Sonic would turn even more blue…

pick up. Sonic was already hyperfast, but his new footwear sent the blue critter into overdrive and if you weren't careful it was incredibly easy to lose one of your precious lives.

Get to the end of each zone's first two stages in one piece and, providing you had enough Rings, you could access the level's bonus room and try to grab one of those Chaos Emeralds. While these bonus rounds were easily the most impressive aspect of the game (you were thrown into a maze that rotated around you while you tried to track down the Emerald) the later stages became incredibly frustrating to complete and it was unsurprising that Sega replaced them in the sequel. But completing these rounds was the only way to earn continues, so if you wanted to get deeper into the game it was necessary to play them.

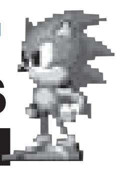
To complement its blinding speed, *Sonic The Hedgehog* featured impressive visuals, stylish character design and a selection of cracking tunes – indeed, the game's critics argued that *Sonic* was a classic case of style over substance. The game's superb level design soon proved this theory untrue, though. While it was possible to simply race through the game, each stage held many hidden items that could only be found after very careful searching. This lengthy exploration was particularly important if you wanted to collect the six precious Chaos Emeralds.

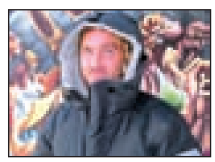
Although it has since been superseded by many (often superior) sequels, the original *Sonic The Hedgehog* still holds a very special place in our hearts.



▼ Pick up enough speed and you could run up walls and upside down. Super-Sonic.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1991





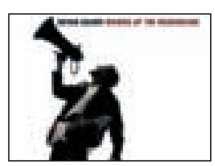
FASHION VICTIM:
If you needed any further proof that the latest 'street' look can make you appear like a right idiot (or in this case, the Michelin Man) then the puffa jacket was the perfect place to start. Strictly for Arctic explorers only.



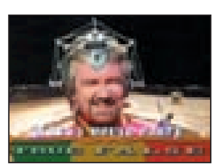
AT THE MOVIES:
After finding huge success with *The Terminator*, it was inevitable that James Cameron, Linda Hamilton and Arnie would return for the sequel, which was filled with state-of-the-art effects and fantastic action scenes.



CARTOON HEROES:
Featuring characters with ridiculous names like Cubbi, Grammi, Gruffi and Zummi, Disney's *Adventures Of The Gummi Bears* proved essential viewing. And who could forget that theme song?



ON THE RADIO:
Canadian rocker Bryan Adams not only released the successful *Waking Up The Neighbours* album, but also managed to hog the charts for an eternity with the dreadful *Everything I Do (I Do It For You)*.



ON THE BOX:
At one stage, watching Noel Edmonds on a Saturday evening was a national institution. *Noel's House Party* may have been what the viewers wanted, but we'll never forgive the bearded one for creating Mr. Blobby.

DONKEY KONG Family Tree

After debuting as a girlfriend-stealing ape, Donkey Kong has gone on to star in numerous games. Clearly not shy of the spotlight, Donkey Kong had made cameo appearances in dozens of Nintendo titles, many of which we didn't have room for here. Most of the time you need to look really hard, but perseverance does pay off. *Punch-Out*, *Super Punch-Out*, *Tetris*, *F1-Race*, *NES Open Tournament Golf*, *Mario's Time Machine*, the Game Boy Camera, *Super Mario RPG* and *Mario Tennis* on the Game Boy Color are just a few of the monkey's star moments.

Now as well known as his original nemesis, Mario, the celebrity simian's Family Tree is long overdue…



DONKEY KONG



- 1981
- Arcade
- When Nintendo's *Radar Scope* was a flop, Miyamoto-san was asked to create a new game. The result was this classic, which established Nintendo as a firm to watch. With simple but addictive gameplay, this title saw DK's debut.

DONKEY KONG JR ARCADE



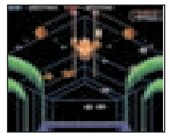
- 1982
- Arcade
- *Donkey Kong Jr* saw the tables turn as the eponymous hero rescued his dad from the clutches of Mario. With four distinctive levels – The Vines, The Chains, The Jumpboard and The Hideout – this was just as enjoyable as *Donkey Kong*.

DONKEY KONG CLASSICS NES



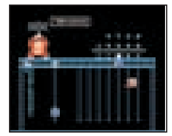
- 1982
- Famicom
- Cashing in on DK's success, Nintendo released *Donkey Kong Classics*, a rehash of *Donkey Kong* and *Donkey Kong Jr*. Although it was just an amalgamation, fans loved it. An arcade version – *Double Donkey Kong* – was also released.

DONKEY KONG 3



- 1983
- Arcade
- Nintendo released the third *DK* game in as many years in 1983. Stanley replaced Mario and you had to shoot DK with insect repellent while guarding five plants at the bottom of the screen. Fun, but not in the same league as the previous games.

DONKEY KONG JR MATH



- 1983
- Famicom
- *Donkey Kong Jr Math* was a real disappointment. Although there were three gameplay modes in this number-based edutainment title, they were all very simplistic and dull. Fortunately, Donkey Kong Jr never went to school again.

DONKEY KONG



- 1994
- Game Boy
- It was inevitable that DK would appear on the Game Boy after his SNES success. The first four levels were identical to the original arcade game, but there were plenty of new ones too. Mario had new abilities, but they spoilt the gameplay a bit.

HANDHELD

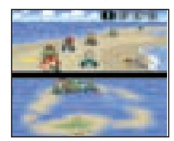
DONKEY KONG COUNTRY



- 1994
- SNES
- Created by Rare and featuring some of the most gorgeous visuals SNES owners had ever seen, this scrolling platformer felt incredibly fresh and proved there was life in the old ape yet. DK was the hero as he set out to find his stash of bananas.

RARE CONNECTION

SUPER MARIO KART



- 1992
- SNES
- After starring in so many of his own games, Donkey Kong took a back seat (pun intended) and joined Mario and friends on the racetrack. Due to his bulk, DK proved to be better suited to more experienced Karters and handled rather like Bowser.

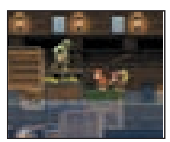
GUEST STAR

DONKEY KONG LAND



- 1995
- Game Boy
- There was no denying that Rare had created an extremely close conversion of its SNES hit, although it was obviously scaled down. While the visuals took a hit, all the gameplay from the SNES version had been captured perfectly.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2: DIDDY KONG'S QUEST



- 1995
- SNES
- *Diddy Kong's Quest* was the superb follow-up to Rare's smash hit and added new twists to the gameplay. With Donkey Kong captured, it was up to Diddy and Dixie Kong to save him, and you were able to turn into various animals.

DONKEY KONG LAND 2: DIDDY KONG'S QUEST



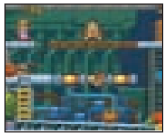
- 1996
- Game Boy
- Sadly, Rare's second Game Boy title failed to match the previous game. The biggest problem was that a key move from the SNES version – the great throwing system – had been dropped. The game was visually impressive, though.

DK COUNTRY 3: DIXIE KONG'S DOUBLE TROUBLE



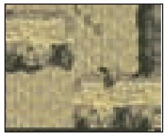
- 1996
- SNES
- The last *Donkey Kong Country* game saw Dixie and Kiddie Kong saving Diddy and Donkey Kong. This title featured lots of mini-games and a few RPG elements. With visuals to die for, *DKC3* was one of the last big titles for Nintendo's dying machine.

GAME AND WATCH GALLERY SERIES



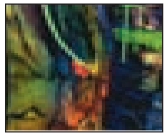
- 1997-2002
- GBC, GBA
- Starting with the second *Gallery* game, Donkey Kong immediately became a key character in the series. All the games here were perfect replicas of the original titles and included special re-creations as well. A great way to see some classics.

DONKEY KONG LAND 3



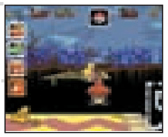
- 1997
- Game Boy
- Despite having fewer RPG elements, Rare's third Game Boy title was a faithful version of the developer's last SNES game. The visuals still looked highly impressive and it was a welcome return to form after *Donkey Kong Land 2*

DONKEY KONG 64



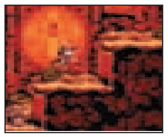
- 1999
- N64
- Rare went to town with its next Kong platformer, which was so big it had to use the N64's expansion pack. With a funky theme tune and five controllable Kongs, *DK64* also contained versions of the original *Donkey Kong* and Rare's *Jet Pak*.

MARIO KART: SUPER CIRCUIT

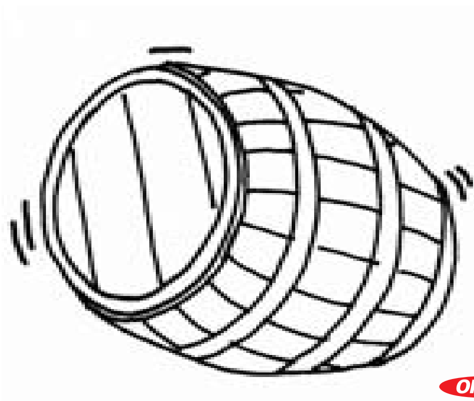


- 2001
- GBA
- The lure of karting was too much for our favourite ape and he hit the tarmac once again in 2001. Created by the excellent Intelligent Systems and featuring all the SNES tracks as a hidden bonus, *Super Circuit* made for a great handheld experience.

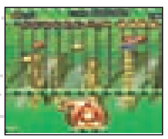
DONKEY KONG COUNTRY



- 2000
- Game Boy Color
- Another re-jig of the SNES hit, but this time the results were much closer to the original. Rare found time to add extra levels and a few enjoyable mini-games. Definitely worth playing, if only to see the improvements over *Donkey Kong Land*.

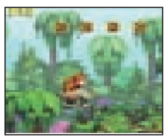


MARIO VS DONKEY KONG



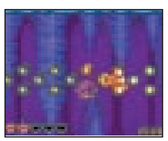
- 2004
- GBA
- Donkey Kong is the bad guy again and Mario must travel through six huge worlds to retrieve the mini-Marios that the giant ape has stolen. With a combination of puzzle and platform action, *Mario Vs Donkey Kong* already sounds very promising.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY



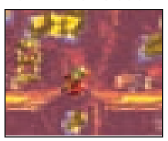
- 2003
- GBA
- Hoping to make a quick buck, Nintendo re-released its SNES classic and added a few extra mini-games. Sadly, the visuals were nowhere near as impressive as before and even the gameplay seemed to have suffered in the translation.

DK: KING OF SWING



- 2004
- GBA
- *DK: King Of Swing* will use an innovative new control system that lets Donkey Kong swing through the jungle using the GBA's shoulder buttons. Like *Mario Vs Donkey Kong*, this one looks like it's going to have quite a few puzzles in it.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2

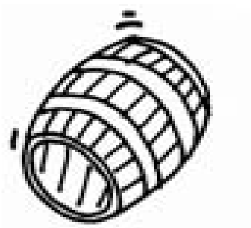


- 2004
- GBA
- Early code suggests that Donkey Kong's second *Country* outing will be similar to the first. The visuals seem to have improved, and fans of the series will be pleased to hear that two new mini-games will also be included.

MARIO KART DS



- 2005
- Nintendo DS
- Nintendo is remaining incredibly tight-lipped about its first batch of DS titles, and apart from a few screenshots nothing is known about the gameplay of this title. Let's just hope that this game is as innovative as the machine it's appearing on…



OFFBEAT

DONKEY KONGA



- 2003
- GameCube
- Always willing to try something new, Donkey Kong's recent outing was a rhythm action game that used special bongos to bang out tunes. Brilliant fun (if a little easy), it will be receiving a new music list for its European release later this year.

DONKEY KONG: JUNGLE BEAT

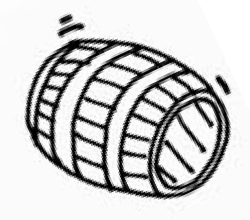


- 2005
- GameCube
- It's safe to say that we're not too sure about Nintendo's next bongo game. You control Donkey Kong by banging the drum to make him move or punch. If you clap, the game then zooms in *Viewtiful Joe*-style and you can dish out even more damage.

MARIO KART 64



- 1996
- N64
- Although it would be three more years before he featured in his own game again, Donkey Kong was happy to show his gaming versatility. After proving a popular character in *Super Mario Kart*, DK was behind the wheel again for the N64 sequel.

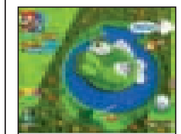


DIDDY KONG RACING



- 1997
- N64
- Although Kong himself was nowhere to be seen, Diddy Kong proved that he was just as good when it came to racing karts. With a superb adventure mode that took ages to complete, *Diddy Kong Racing* was another hit from Rare.

MARIO GOLF



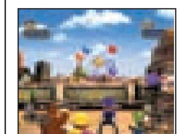
- 1999
- N64
- Keen to prove there was more to him than just hanging around platforms and driving karts, DK showed he could play a decent game of golf. His size meant he was perfect for taking long, powerful shots, though often at the expense of accuracy.

SUPER SMASH BROTHERS



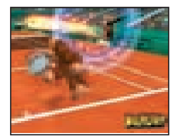
- 1999
- N64
- Pitting some of Nintendo's well-loved characters against each other, *Super Smash Brothers* was an immensely enjoyable brawler. Donkey Kong had a nice range of moves and could cause serious damage in the hands of a pro.

MARIO PARTY SERIES



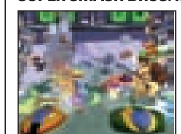
- 1999-present
- N64, Cube
- The *Mario Party* franchise has had varying degrees of success. Nintendo updates each iteration with new mini-games and characters but, for us, the third and fifth games are the best as they pushed the series in new directions.

MARIO TENNIS



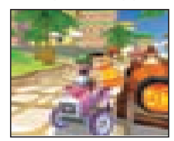
- 2000
- N64
- The lure of a good sports game was always tough for Donkey Kong to resist so he joined Mario and Luigi on the tennis courts. The big ape could pull off some very impressive shots and was a tough adversary. A Cube version is due next year.

SUPER SMASH BROS. MELEE



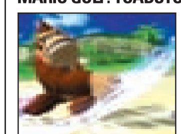
- 2002
- GameCube
- *Super Smash Bros. Melee* offered a similar experience to the N64 version. While there were plenty of additional features on offer, we couldn't help but feel a little disappointed.

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!



- 2003
- GameCube
- Now that each Kart could carry two players, it was finally possible to create the ultimate monkey duo. The combination of Diddy Kong's speed and Donkey Kong's handling meant the furry pair were extremely tough to beat.

MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR



- 2003
- GameCube
- Donkey and Diddy teamed up again for the Cube version of *Mario Golf* and proved to be perfect partners. While the putting was sometimes tricky, the comedy value of watching Diddy and Donkey swing their clubs was immense.









Long Live Retro!

SHEER ART ATTACK

Long-time readers will no doubt be aware of the gorgeous art at the front of each Retro section; these fine pieces of penmanship originally appeared on the covers of Crash magazine and sprang from the drawing board of Oliver Frey. We caught up with the man who's become synonymous with great gaming art…

Forget all that nonsense about not judging books by their covers. When it came to *Crash* magazine, Oliver Frey's cover art was the reason many Eighties gamers picked up a copy of the Spectrum magazine. Aliens, monsters, ninjas… whatever Frey turned his hand to, it invariably looked spectacular, and his artwork is still the subject of many a fevered retro conversation today.

Now a publishing director, Frey has a distinguished (and international) past in the games industry. Born in Zurich in 1948, Frey was the eldest of three children. Although both his parents came from southern Switzerland (and thus spoke fluent Italian), living in Zurich meant the family picked up German too. When Frey Senior's job took him to England for three years, the family followed, adding to their polyglot upbringing. "Childhood was what I'd call happy and normal," recalls Frey, "albeit with a more international upbringing than my peers of the time."

It was Oliver's arrival in England in 1956 that ignited his love of drawing with his main inspiration coming from the *Eagle* comic and its classic Dan Dare strips. "I started copying the drawings, was praised at school for them, and it carried on from there," recalls Frey, who says that artistic talent runs in his family. "My great-grandfather on dad's side was a painter who ended up working in America for many years, mainly in landscapes and portraiture, before returning home and buying a house from the proceeds."

Despite his love for Dan Dare's adventures and his uncanny ability to mimic them, Frey was really inspired by the work of Frank Bellamy. "While Dan Dare was great, it was Frank Bellamy, the illustrator of the back-cover true-life stories and other series, who really inspired me," explains Frey. "His dynamic, filmic style of clear line and colour art was (and still is) some of the best produced in Britain. Don Lawrence was good too, but less skilled at figure drawing and much more painterly in style – however, I did write to him with some samples of my work when I was about 14, and he replied with an encouraging note on my future prospects."

Although he had to return to Switzerland in 1959, Frey convinced an English friend to send him copies of *Eagle*, and as he continued to lap up the adventures of his comic-book heroes, Frey realised that his calling in life was as an artist. After persuading his parents to let him take a correspondence course while at school, Frey began studying the Famous Artists Series, a collection of three huge books that was specifically aimed at commercial art.

"It started with the simplest basics and then went on to fully professional aspects of the art, including the psychological ins and outs of composition and getting the visual message across to the reader in the most impactive possible way," Frey says. "At the end of each chapter you were given a test assignment that you sent off to be judged and criticised by your teachers in Holland. The course demanded self-



discipline because you were sat at home doing it with no supervision and at your own pace. I learned just about everything I know in the area of commercial art from Famous Artists, and if something like this still existed I would recommend it to any serious aspirant to the trade of illustrator; no fancy art-school nonsense, just down-to-earth figurative and compositional skill-building."

FROM SOLDIER TO SUPERMAN

With the course passed and out of the way, Frey considered his options and, during a trip to England, approached the London Film School with aspirations of being a film director. Despite his enthusiasm ("I was keen on Bond movies, historical epics and most of all on *Lawrence Of Arabia*") he was advised to try again when he was a little older. Disappointed but unperturbed, Frey returned to Switzerland in order to begin his compulsory national service. "Army service in Switzerland is a given, so you don't think too much about it," reveals Frey. "Whatever the reservations, it's a helpful, maturing conclusion to your school years. You're thrown together with kids your age, from all walks of life, and learn how to get on together as you're drilled and ordered about – it helps get rid of much youthful egocentricity… and instils a (now unfashionable) sense of duty."

After six months of national service, Frey took a place studying English literature and history at Berne University. In Frey's own words, this decision was "a disaster"; the film-loving student lasted only one term on the course, feeling he couldn't fit in with his fellow students, so he persuaded his father to send him to the London Film School (then known as the London School of Film Technique).

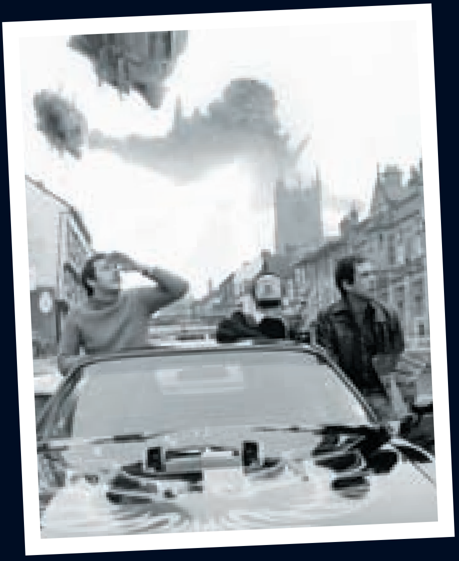
As any student will know, studying – particularly in London – isn't easy, and it wasn't long before Frey was trying to find creative ways to support himself. "I needed to make money while at film school, and thought that the *War Picture Libraries* – small, cheaply printed black-and-white 64-page comic strip stories – might be a possibility," remembers Frey. "I sent in some samples, and the editor, EJ Bensberg, gave me my first real illustrating job. I carried on drawing them throughout the Seventies, and my money situation while studying improved radically."

▼ Graeme Kidd – blinged up to the nines in his mayoral robes. A far cry from the days of working on *Crash* magazine.



BIGGER AND BETTER THINGS

Crash may no longer be around, but its staff went on to bigger and better things. We know what happened to tips jockey Nick Roberts (he's now our managing editor), but Frey was able to shed some light on the whereabouts of other ex employees. "Graeme Kidd is Ludlow's mayor, and we still meet in the town. David Western is a friend and neighbour. Carol Kinsey (the _Crash_ mail-order goddess) is now Carol Parkinson, having married _Crash_'s screen photographer Michael Parkinson, and I see both regularly. Warren Lapworth (_Zzap!64_ reviewer) works with me, as does Newsfield's first employee, Matthew Uffindell. And of course I still work with Roger Kean and my brother Franco in our book company, Thalamus Publishing."



▲ The Frey brothers and Roger Kean in the early days of Newsfield. They still work together today, though the spaceships have now gone…

Despite a further three-month spell in National Service (where he turned down the chance to go to officer school) Frey decided that he wanted to continue with his film course and returned to England once his service had ended. While he continued to illustrate for *War Picture Libraries*, Frey started work on a film script and tracked down an old friend from film school, Roger Kean. The two planned to set up a film company in Switzerland but had trouble pitching their idea. Disappointed with the failed project, Frey continued his freelance work while Kean went on to become a freelance film editor (although their paths would eventually cross at a later date when they formed Newsfield Limited).

As Frey's reputation improved so did the offers and before long he found himself drawing the very comic strips that had inspired him as a child. Although he eventually got to work on the likes of Dan Dare and the Trigan Empire, his dream work wasn't quite how he had imagined it… "Working on the strips was disappointing," laments Frey. "By the time I did a stint on Dan Dare it had gone to cheap newsprint, the stories were numbskull and the character had been changed out of recognition. Taking over from Don Lawrence on the Trigan Empire in *Look And Learn* magazine was better, but all they wanted was a replacement for Lawrence after he left for more lucrative pastures." Still, the work for such classic comic strips meant that Frey's art was reaching a greater audience than before and this created exciting new projects for the talented artist, the most important being part of the opening credits of *Superman: The Movie*.

"That was a time when I trying to get into the film technicians' union," recalls Frey. "The then head of the union pointed me towards the *Superman* production because they needed a visualiser for the flying sequences. At the interview with the art director it transpired they were having enough trouble coping with the action director's flights of fancy on this without needing to encourage him with even more exciting (in other words, expensive) visuals. However, director Richard Donner wanted to start the movie with the camera panning over a Thirties Superman comic to focus on a final frame of the *Daily Globe* building, which would dissolve to a real-life model shot. A hurried briefing from Richard in his office – which amounted to 'I need a cop patrolling the streets, pull up into overhead view of Metropolis' streets, zoom in to this building. You can do it, kid' – led to me producing the cover and two pages, which they coloured up and used in the film."

NEXT STOP, LUDLOW

Pleased with his success, but eager to push himself further, Frey's next project was the one that would make his name. In 1983, with his brother Franco and old friend Roger Kean, Frey set up Newsfield to operate Crash Micro Games Action, a mail order service based in Ludlow that sold Spectrum software. "I produced illustrations for all of our ads and the catalogue of games we sent out, while Roger Kean wrote the reviews," says Frey of his early days on *Crash*. "Then someone suggested we turn the catalogue into a proper magazine, with real reviews. We sent a copy of the catalogue to a magazine distributor, who showed it to the central buyer at WH Smith. To our surprise, the Smith's man thought it would work if it was a 'real' magazine."

It might have been a great idea in practice, but putting a magazine together wasn't the easiest of tasks, especially from a financial perspective. Kean borrowed £2,500 from Barclaycard (allegedly to pay for a new kitchen) only to find out that their distributor had gone bust by the second issue of the magazine. After receiving no money from their publisher, it appeared that *Crash*'s days as a magazine were over before they began. But, as Frey explains, fortune smiled on the team in several ways. "Our ad manager did a fabulous deal with the mighty distributor Comag. They loved *Crash* and bailed us out by collecting the first two issues' revenues and advancing us for the next six. Luck was also with us on the printing front; the printer went bust, so we didn't have to pay anything out for about eight months. That ended all our cash flow problems." Money was only one side of the story, though, and the small team soon found out that there were plenty of other problems involved with the running of a monthly magazine.

"IF THE ILLUSTRATIONS IN CRASH LOOKED SPLODGY THEN BLAME THE COW GUM – HORRIBLE STUFF!"



"Editorially, it was hard work," reveals Frey. "I think the first issue had around 75,000 words – a hell of a lot for the time. It was all typed on a small electric typewriter, sent as manuscript to a London typesetter and then came back a week later as galleys to be laid out. I did a lot of 'cow-gumming' along with Roger, and usually filled in the mono illustrations direct onto the layout sheets. If some look splodgy, blame it on the damned cow gum – horrible stuff!"

Aside from designing the body of the magazine, Frey was also responsible for producing *Crash*'s covers – the work for which he has become best known. However, he wasn't at leisure to spend four weeks coming up with a fantastic concept. "Once editorial had made a decision on what topic or game warranted the front-page position, it was up to me to visualise it in an eye-grabbing, magazine-selling way," Frey explains. "By the time *Zzap!* and *Amtix* (our Amstrad mag) came along it meant three covers plus ancillary editorial illustrations a month; add sundry giveaway posters and you had a full work schedule. In the first year of *Crash* I also drew four colour pages of a comic strip a month: anyone remember The Terminal Man? Staffing was also a problem. The local schoolboy reviewers were plentiful, and pretty good too, but as we grew we needed more professional staff in every area, and frankly none of us was prepared for the task of management. But I think the inevitable tensions combined with the level of freedom editorial and design enjoyed created some of the best magazines of their kind."

M'LEARNED FRIENDS

As *Crash*'s success continued, so did the confidence of the team and the respect the magazine earned in the industry. After becoming increasingly irritated by *Sinclair User*'s editorial attitude towards *Crash* and its reviews, Frey and the rest of the team decided to hit back. The end result made retro history and saw *Crash* spoofing EMAP's *Sinclair User* in a four-page piece that subsequently got withdrawn from sale (issue 19 if you're planning to look for it on eBay). "Perhaps it was a part of the Newsfield charm that a good bashing session in the pub turned into a full-scale plan for the lampoon," recalls Frey. "Obviously, had we lawyers on board like any 'proper' magazine publisher the notion would have been shot down in flames before it ever hit the layout boards. But then so probably would have most of *Crash* or *Zzap!64*. I guess we all thought it a bit of a joke and that it would be taken that way by EMAP; *Sinclair User*'s editor thought so too and tried to stop his publisher taking action. The first we knew was when Roger Kean received a 'courtesy call' from *Sinclair User*'s counsel warning of the impending injunction hearing in two days' time."

Newsfield lost the case, but not in a way that EMAP had expected. *Sinclair User* wanted the spoof issue of *Crash* pulled because it was defamatory; the judge disagreed, but he did grant an injunction on the grounds that it breached copyright as the lampoon was so accurate. As copyright infringement is far harder to prove than defamation, EMAP didn't have such a cut-and-dried case – and thus Newsfield lived to see another day.

"As it happened, about 60 per cent of the copies had already gone into wholesale, the rest were recalled and the offending four pages were guillotined out, so Newsfield didn't suffer too badly financially, and later made an out of court settlement," Frey explains. "The whole affair, however, had a highly beneficial effect on *Crash* sales; we may have been 'pirates' to the London publishing community, but our readers loved us for it."

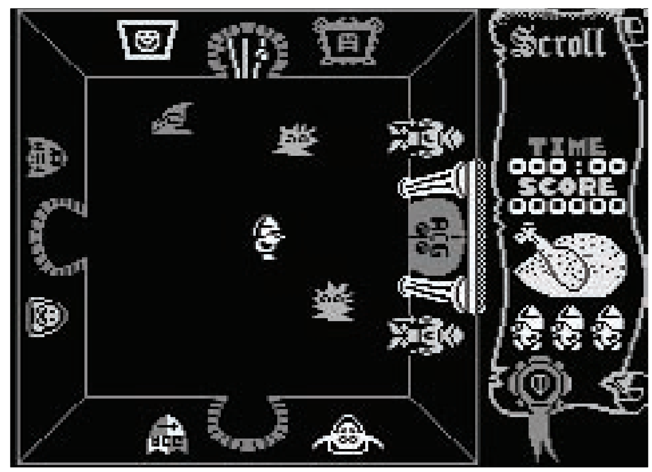
Sadly, Newsfield eventually went under in 1991, although *Crash* itself continued for another year under the Europress banner. The demise of Newsfield is worthy of its own feature and while Frey was understandably "gutted" about the closure of the company he had helped form, he was at least able to take it in his stride. "You have to carry on making a living… Actually, I had booked a week in Egypt several weeks before and saw no reason to cancel it as it had already been paid for, so I was able to console myself in 35 degrees, sipping cocktails with umbrellas."

Although he's no longer creating magazine covers, Frey continues to produce impressive artwork (mostly for publications from Thalamus). The subject matter may be vastly different – the Roman army features heavily in his latest project – but the way he goes about creating his masterpieces is still the same. "I don't do any deep breathing or yoga exercises," laughs Frey, who cites artists such as Eugene Delacroix, Norman Rockwell and Frank Frazetta as personal favourites. "Once I know what I'm supposed to illustrate, I start visualising scenes in my mind. Then I start scribbling mini-compositions on the backs of envelopes (so rough that only I can make sense of them) to try to capture the dynamics I want. Then I fix on a thumbnail I like and pencil it up – unfortunate colleagues may have to pose for face and hand details (the only use I make of photo reference). One thing I always do is hold the drawing up to a mirror to see it as new, as I

"IT'S NICE TO KNOW YOUR WORK IS APPRECIATED, BUT I CURL UP WHEN PEOPLE PRAISE ME TO MY FACE"

PLAY THE GAME

Despite playing such a pivotal role in the gaming press, Oli Frey never really took to playing games. When asked if he'd describe himself as a gamer (past or present), he admits that he'd have to say no, although he has played his fair share of titles. "I used to play the ones I mapped for *Crash* and *Zzap!* extensively to get the feel for them and enjoyed doing so," he says. "My main interest was in understanding the programmers' intentions, often hidden in those blobs and squiggles, in order to create a cover image that would do them proud. I did complete Ultimate's *Atic Atak* and I got quite good at playing the original *Sonic The Hedgehog*…"



▲ *Atic Atak* obviously had that special something that made Oli Frey want to play it right through to the end.

suffer from astigmatism and faces can become lopsided."

While the way he goes about creating his work remains unchanged, the same cannot be said for the tools he now uses. "I once said in an interview in *Crash* that I could never see myself using a computer for illustration. Well, that was then… In recent years virtually none of my artwork has ended up as a painting on a board; my airbrush compressor has rusted and all the coloured inks have long dried up. I still draw the original on paper, either in line or halftone, but I then scan it in and colour up on computer. However, while this has suited a lot of recent work, the result seems to me to lack the fizz and verve necessary for action images — it's neat and tidy, but lacks the gutsyness I like. I recently did a series of 'carnage' battle scenes of Vikings, and no matter how hard I try to think otherwise, I know they would have been proper scenes from hell had I done them in ink and acrylic."

The tools may have changed, but one thing Frey still finds difficult to accept is dealing with the adulation his work has attracted. "I suppose I shouldn't, but I still get embarrassed," he admits. "Of course, that doesn't mean I'm unhappy about it – it's pleasing to know that your work is appreciated, but I do tend to curl up when people praise me to my face."

Unfortunately for Frey, the spotlight will be turned on his work when a book celebrating his creations appears in shops this year. *The Fantasy Art Of Oliver Frey* was the brainchild of Frey's business partners and is described as a "luxury colour volume" – a far cry from the now crumbling paper of those 20-year-old *Crash* magazines. And if you ask us, it's high time Frey's modern masterpieces appeared on the coffee tables of retro gamers around the world.





OLIVER FREY







Why Don't They Remake…

ACTRAISER

Slaying monsters and playing god – why hasn't this been remade yet?

Release: **1993**
Format: **SNES**
Publisher: **Enix Corporation**
Developer: **Quintet**

A*ctRaiser* really shouldn't have worked. A fusion of frantic hack-and-slash action and *Sim City*-style world building? What kind of crazy idea was that? Well, a not so crazy one, actually, as when *Actraiser* appeared on the SNES in 1993 (1991 in Japan) it was a revelation that remains popular today.

Taking on the role of an all-powerful deity, your task was to provide suitable homes for your followers while defending them from the landscape's many enemies. Before you started building your utopia, though, you had to ensure that the relevant area was safe, which meant seeing off any nasties. A fantastic Mode 7 sequence saw you zooming down towards the relevant hot spot and your divine essence took control of a statue before cutting a swathe of destruction through the eye-meltingly gorgeous levels.

Reach the end of the stage and you'd face the obligatory boss; fortunately many of their attack patterns were easy to decipher, so you were soon able to get on with building your kingdom. Admittedly, the Sim side of the game was pretty linear and simple, but there was something endearing about it. As your followers learnt new skills you were able to grow crops, build bridges and create more advanced homes for your loyal subjects to live in. It was even possible for them to seal off the lairs of nearby monsters, which resulted in you being rewarded with various goodies.

These monsters constantly hassled your followers and would demolish buildings, destroy crops, carry off hapless villagers and generally make your divine life hell. Luckily, a guardian angel was always on hand to offer advice and (most importantly) defeat any nearby nasties with his bow and arrow.

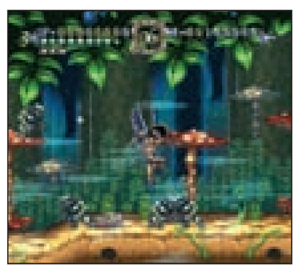
As each section of the land was cleared, your villagers would discover a second infestation of monsters once they'd established their settlement, so it was off for another side-scrolling platform section before moving on to the next, tougher area.

With great gameplay, outstanding tunes and some lovely visuals, *ActRaiser* may not be the game it once was, but it's still good fun. Although currently available for mobile phones, it's been horrifically butchered and now contains only three scrolling levels, so a remake makes great sense.

While a GBA version would be the logical choice, we reckon a DS version could work equally well. The side-scrolling sections, for example, could be enhanced by giving you weapons that could be selected by using the touch screen; you could even hit bosses with your stylus by mimicking sword strokes.

The strategy sections could also be improved by letting you use the stylus to show where you'll build next. Stylus control would also make *ActRaiser*'s rather cumbersome menus considerably easier to negotiate.

In fact, the more we think about it, the more we want it.



SECOND TIME UNLUCKY

Obviously hoping to build on the success of the original game, a sequel appeared in Japan in 1993. Sadly, it shared little of the magic of the first *ActRaiser*.

Completely missing the Sim section that had added so much to its predecessor, *ActRaiser 2* was little more than a generic hack-and-slash arcade title; and while it looked very nice and featured more fantastic music, it was a pretty uninspired follow-up. It's worth a look by all means, but the original is still so much better even if it's now starting to look a little dated.

RACE THE RAINBOW...

S•U•P•E•R M•A•R•I•O K•A•R•T

Great Retro Gaming Moments

Release: 1993
Format: NES
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-House





For all its cutesy *Mario* heritage, the moment you reached the final race of the Special Cup in *Super Mario Kart* you realised that the game really didn't like you. It seemed like all along it had been going easy on you, lulling you into a false sense of security, so that when it sprung Rainbow Road on you it would be all the more painful.

Still, you simply had to finish it. Some of the other tracks had been taxing, some difficult, but this one really lived up to its Expert rating. The bright, primary-coloured track belied the fact that there was nothing between you and black oblivion, and that you were going to be falling into it. A lot.

Rainbow Road seemed impossible, but with time and patience it could be tamed, and that was what made it enjoyable in a masochistic way. Multiplayer Rainbow Road gave an opportunity to find ever more creative ways to drop your friends into space, and the winner would often just be the person who happened to get hit by the fewest shells.

The track has shown up in many Nintendo racers since, appearing in most of the subsequent *Mario Kart* games as well as making a cameo in *F-Zero X*. It's perhaps telling that in its later incarnations Nintendo had emasculated the track in some way, either by adding barriers or making it unbelievably long and dull, but you can never forget the first visit.

WORST LICENCE EVER

Oh, just duck off...

HOWARD THE DUCK

Release: 1987
Format: Various 8-bit systems
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Software Studios

Film licences are tricky prospects for any developer. After you've spent the annual budget of a small South American country on securing the licence, you then have to try to create a game with whatever money is left in your wallet. Fortunately, if the film's a hit, you've got a good chance of raking back some of your cash – but what happens when the film's rubbish? Well, you end up with the likes of *Howard The Duck*, a lame game based on an even lamer movie.

From the moment *Howard The Duck* started up you realised that all your hard-earned cash had been wasted on less a duck, more a turkey. While it faithfully mimicked the plot of the movie, the game was let down by shoddy visuals, fiddly controls and dull gameplay. Controlling Howard was laboriously tricky and just making him follow your joystick directions was enough to put the average gamer off. Add to this some of the most unimaginative level design to ever make it into a game and it's a wonder that *Howard The Duck* wasn't marketed as a cure for insomnia.



▲ You don't really need a withering caption here to see how rubbish this game is, do you? We hope not…

With the movie proving a huge flop (not everything George Lucas touches turns to gold) the game quickly followed. If only it hadn't been burned so forcefully into our minds, we might be able to sleep at night…

TO LOVE A LEMMING

The much-loved Lemmings is one of the most famous puzzle games of all time and has spawned countless imitations as well as numerous sequels (some great, some not so great). Eager to find out more about this classic title we were able to track down some of the original DMA team and take a walk with them down memory lane.

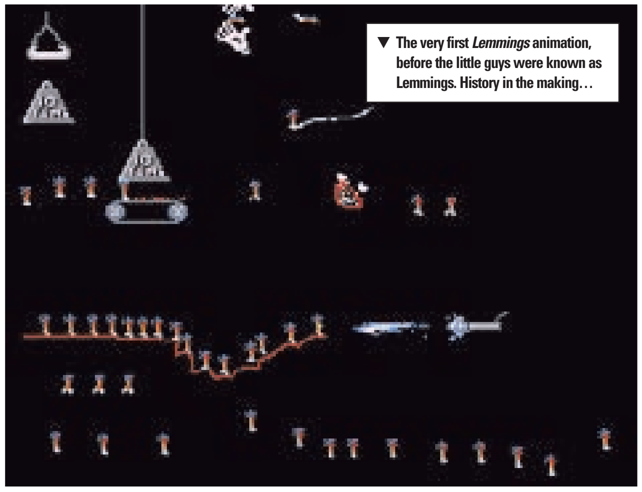
If you were an Amiga gamer on Valentine's Day in 1991 perhaps you'd sent a card to that girl you had always fancied but never had the nerve to ever ask out. If you were lucky, you may have even got to go out on a date that evening. However, if you were truly fortunate you'd have been sitting at home playing DMA Design's superb *Lemmings*. Dundee-based DMA's mammalian lateral puzzler appeared on the Amiga on 14 February 1991, and within months had also cropped up on the PC and Atari ST. Soon it would migrate to consoles, and then there were the sequels… it was the start of something big.

The Scottish developer had already dabbled with the shooter genre and released the likes of *Menace* and *Blood Money*, but *Lemmings* was to be a step (or rather, hundreds of little steps) in a new direction – the puzzle genre.

Lemmings' conception harks back to 1989 while progress was being made on DMA's excellent *Walker*. Scott Johnson was working on *Walker*'s graphics, and was challenged by Mike Dailly (*Lemmings*' programmer before Dave Jones took over) who felt that the 16x16-pixel characters Johnson was creating were too large and could be shrunk.

Before long Dailly had created a set of characters that conformed to an 8x8-pixel block and had them being squashed by a 10-ton weight in a simple animation. Gary Timmons (*Lemmings*' level designer) added several more implements of destruction: a cannibalistic clown, a pair of crushing hands and a rotating device of death and the hilarious animation was complete. "I modified the movement of the little figures to make them move more smoothly and added the further animations," says Timmons. "The potential was seen to develop this into a game, and so some tests were done where we saw how many of the little figures could be displayed on screen at once."

It was Russell Kay, author of the PC version, who first saw the animation's potential. Kay was also the first person

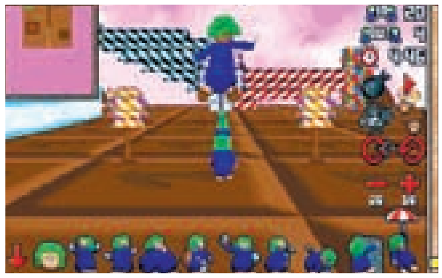


▼ The very first *Lemmings* animation, before the little guys were known as Lemmings. History in the making…

to refer to the characters as Lemmings, and by September 1989 Kay had a demo running at that year's PCW show. The demo itself consisted of a single screen and featured Lemmings walking across a landscape; once they reached the end of the screen, they simply re-appeared on the other side.

Although the team was convinced *Lemmings* could be a hit, getting publishers to share their vision was not so easy. "We knew we were onto something special and it was really a matter of persuading publishers," recalls Kay. "We were downhearted when everyone – [eventual publisher] Psygnosis included – turned us down. It was only when we had most of the levels finished that Psygnosis realised the potential of the game and eagerly embraced the project."

OH NO! NOT 3D



As 3D continued to gain popularity, it was inevitable that the Lemmings would follow suit and, sure enough, *Lemmings 3D* was released for the PlayStation and PC in 1995. It never received the same acclaim as the original games, though, mainly because it was rubbish. "The 3D version of the game never hit the mark," says Russell Kay. "I think that *Pikmin* is closer to a 3D *Lemmings* than anything else that claims to be, although I'd love there to be sequels worthy of the name in the future." "*3D Lemmings* was simply horrible," agrees Mike Dailly. "It might work better now, but again, it needs more work than simply doing *Lemmings* in 3D. I wish someone at Sony would actually try." So do we, Mike, so do we…

LET'S GO!

Lemmings may have started without a publisher, but the development time was relatively stress-free and caused DMA few problems. "The actual game took around a year to finish," confirms Dailly, "and to be honest, there was nothing at all that tricky from what I can recall. The main thing was the number of Lemmings, and I think that this was dictated by the PC version, although I believe the Amiga 'could' have had more."

It's a view that's shared by Timmons. "The design, coding and animation of the Lemmings took several months, while the main level design took another few months, then a few months at the end to refine the levels and tweak the difficulty curve," he confirms. "There were no serious difficulties or problems during development, but the solid metal collision detection was a tricky part of the game to work out and is one aspect that I think could have been done much better [and it was in *Lemmings 2* and *3*]."

Unsurprisingly, the trickiest aspect of *Lemmings* was its level design, but maybe not in the way that you'd expect. "The main problem was that we had all these really hard levels but no easy ones," explains Dailly. "So Gary set about making simple ones, either by making easier versions of hard ones, or brand new and simpler levels. This, I believe, is where many games fail today – they don't spend the time making a learning curve. It's also one of the reasons why I think the game did so well."

Timmons agrees. "It wasn't hard to put down some blocks in the custom-made editor to make a level, but actually making a level with any sort of substance could be difficult," he explains. "Sometimes levels would turn out to be much easier than designed by taking another route and would then be reworked to prevent this from happening. Other levels could be done in many ways, but some had certain critical points that needed to be done just right to be successful. We tried to put in a variety of different styles of puzzle to avoid the game being repetitive, including levels that used graphics from other games, which I thought was a very clever idea."

A game like *Lemmings* requires plenty of playtesting and for Dailly there was nothing more satisfying then seeing someone get flummoxed by a puzzle DMA had created. "We did manage to fox Psygnosis now and then," he smiles. "You could always tell the levels Gary did, as they were very 'minimal' – a few blocks and that was it. Levels by Scott and myself tended to look more like pictures. Scott's tended to be packed better than mine, but I liked drawing huge levels – 'Hunt the Nessy' and 'The Steel Mines of Kessel' were mine, for example. I also loved making ▶▶▶

Classic Game Lookback



▶ The backgrounds may have often been simple but you were playing for the puzzles, not the looks.

TO LOVE A LEMMING



▶▶▶ the user do multiple things at once. 'The Fast Food Kitchen' was mine, and required the player to jump back and forth to eventually complete the level."

BREAKING OUT

Perhaps one of the most exciting prospects of *Lemmings* was the level creator that DMA had planned. Sadly, it never saw the light of day. "There was some discussion at DMA Design to bring out a *Lemmings* level editor," reveals Timmons. "It could have been a lot of fun but there were a lot of conditions that had to be met when making a level and it would have been easy to make levels that were impossible to complete and this could have caused a lot of frustration, so in the end we never actually did it."

While *Lemmings*' level design is adored by many, it's the incredibly chirpy music that most people instantly recall. Remixed variations of well-known tunes, they're instantly recognisable and perfectly complement the on-screen insanity. Worried about securing the licences that would have been needed, Brian Johnson decided to remix timeless classics (*London Bridge* and *How Much Is That Doggy In The Window?* among others) that were out of copyright. "In those days you didn't really bother trying to secure licences," reveals Dailly. "However, it was just the start of worrying about it, so the copied music was eventually dropped and the irritating ones were quickly added. I don't even think anyone actually thought about just doing a set of totally original tunes, which is very odd."

One musical option that had to be dropped could have been terrific, but those licences got in the way again. "We originally wanted to have lots of Sixties TV show themes running through the game, not just in the music but in the actual animation and level design," says Kay. "Unfortunately, we could not get any of the licences involved. I have a particularly fond memory of the *Mission Impossible* Lemmings…"

The music may have been rather unconventional, but the look of *Lemmings* was a lot more straightforward, some might even say basic. As always, though, there was a reason behind each decision and in this case it was a technical one. "The way the levels worked with Lemmings walking over the foreground meant that they had to look 'basic' since they would have walked over the backgrounds too," reveals Timmons. In a way, the simple backgrounds accentuated the Lemmings themselves and left you in no doubt that they were the real driving force behind the game, a fact that was further cemented by their superb animation.

The famous green hair came about not just through choice, but also because of the PC's EGA palette, which only displayed 16 colours on screen at one time. "We decided that green hair was much nicer than blue," confirms Dailly,



With *Lemmings* nearing completion, DMA found itself having to drop a few features from the game before it hit the shelves. The biggest omission on the PC version was the excellent two-player mode that would be enjoyed by so many Amiga owners. The team had spent a lot of time playing the likes of *Stunt Car Racer* and *Populous*, and Dailly even went so far as to rig up a system so he could use one computer to control the mouse on the other. Due to the Amiga's ability to have two mice plugged into it, Dave Jones (*Lemmings*' main programmer) eventually decided to stick with the split-screen set-up.

While Kay tried various ways to get the multiplayer game running on the PC, he eventually had to admit defeat, although, as he explains, coding the PC version wasn't as straightforward as the other systems. "It was purely down to driver issues," reveals Kay. "Nothing that we found could handle two mice on one machine, even though most machines had two serial ports. Also, the PC version was much bigger than all the other versions as it had to handle VGA, EGA, CGA and Tandy versions of the machine and it had to work on machines that were about the speed of the Amiga and ST. Needless to say, it took a long time to get it optimised to hit all the targets."

THE GREAT ESCAPE

The hard work paid off and *Lemmings* became an instant hit, and DMA soon found itself porting its hit to many other machines including the Lynx, Spectrum and CDi.

An arcade version by Data East was also in the works, but it never saw the light of day. While none of the original team worked on the title, many have their reasons as to why Data East didn't go ahead with the project. "I

A CAST OF THOUSANDS

YOU'D BE SURPRISED HOW MANY PEOPLE IT TAKES TO MAKE A LEMMING…

Lemmings had a number of developers, although as Dailly points out on his website, many took unfair credit – "the number of people that claim to have been involved in the original *Lemmings* is huge, the actual number isn't," he says. Nevertheless, the *Lemmings* team was still fairly large for the time. Dailly was the original programmer (although Dave Jones completed his work), Russell Kay was hard at work on the PC version, while Gary Timmons worked on the level design. The rest of the team consisted of Scott and Brian Johnson, Steve Hammond, Brian Watson, Tim Wright and Tony Williams. Although Scott and Brian Johnson (who *are* related – they're brothers) seem to have vanished without a trace, many of the team keep in touch and have moved on since leaving DMA. Gary Timmons is at Denki, Russell Kay is now managing director of Visual Science, while Dave Jones set up developer Real Time Worlds in 2002, where he's since been joined by Mike Dailly. Brian Watson has moved further afield to work for Midway in Texas.







▲ Sometimes you had to be cruel to be kind – the only way out of here was to blow up your Blockers. Poor little buggers.

◀ Remember kids – in the event of falling off an Ionic column, it's unlikely that an umbrella will save you. Safety first.



wasn't involved, but I heard that the focus testing did not go well and that it was too sedentary for a coin-op," reveals Kay. "I loved it, though, and the ROMS were rescued from destruction and are now immortalised in MAME." Kay isn't the only one who was sad to see that *Lemmings* never made it to arcades. "I really liked it and thought the trackball control worked fine as a control method," says Timmons. "I think it could have been really popular and I would have loved to see it in the local arcades."

DMA had little time to worry about the fate of the arcade game, as it was eager to start on its ambitious sequel. Unsurprisingly, a game with the scope of *Lemmings 2* faced a lot more problems, although it did allow DMA to bring the idea of tribes back after having to drop them from the original game. "*Lemmings 2* had some very cool technical advances over the original game," explains Dailly. "Dave wanted to expand this into consoles (which is where the money was heading), and to do this he developed some new technology that used consoles better, rather than just brute force the way the original version did. There were still some big problems to solve on a console, but now at least they were solvable. In the past, conversions of *Lemmings* to a console were very tricky, slow and usually crippled the game.

"Now, not only could a console match the home computer version, it could enhance it – the SNES version of *Lemmings 2* had parallax backgrounds and even snow. The Amiga version also benefited from the smooth scrolling that was developed for the SNES. Even the PC version had true, smooth scrolling, and that was a monster task that Russell only just managed to pull off. It was so effective that we started to see how poor PC monitors were at the time, since we started to see how badly the displays were warped."

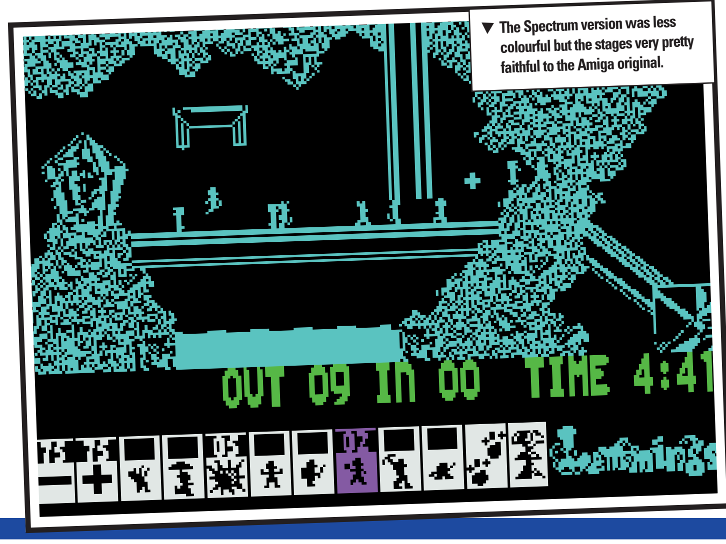
RUNNING WILD

Technical advancements weren't the only benefits of the sequels, as DMA could now bring a whole host of new Lemmings to the series and was also able to include a storyline. "We had brought out more levels using the same skills in *Oh No! More Lemmings* [a *Lemmings* expansion pack] and wanted to expand on the skills that could be given to the Lemmings, so we worked on that for the sequel," explains Timmons. "We came up with a whole bunch of new skills including the Pole Vaulter (which I thought was one of the more bizarre ideas, but it worked). The tribes theme also added a story and a reason for the Lemmings to get from A to B, and it allowed us to dress the Lemmings in new ways. In *Lemmings* if the player got stuck on a level that was it. In the sequel a player would have to get stuck on 12 levels before they were completely stuck. Other developments were the introduction of taller levels which could be scrolled up and down as well as from side to side and a fan to blow the flying Lemmings about."

All the gameplay enhancements didn't appear overnight, though, and DMA was having problems managing its team (it had grown considerably since the original game) and deciding on which directions the sequels would take. Although there was never a problem financially, Kay in particular didn't find the sequel as much fun and left DMA before work started on *Lemmings 3*. "There was a lot more pressure on us and we were less sure about the design, I don't think *Lemmings 2* flowed as naturally," he reveals. "Lets just say I didn't enjoy working on *Lemmings 2* as much as I did on *Lemmings 1*."

Kay may not have enjoyed working on the sequel, but it's clear to see that the original game was a labour of love for everyone who worked on it. And the reasons for its success are obvious. "It's all about the simplest of things," Dailly says. "Simplicity, killing huge numbers of the cute little guys, and the freedom of being able to complete levels in lots of different ways. In a strange way, this was the actual forerunner to *GTA*, as it's what got Dave hooked on 'open' games." Considering Dave Jones and the DMA team would go on to develop *Grand Theft Auto* and its sequels (DMA was bought by Rockstar in 1999, shortly after Jones' departure, becoming Rockstar North), this emphasis on freedom isn't so surprising. But then the success of the *GTA* series shouldn't be so odd considering this was the team that took a bunch of witless rodents to the top of the charts on every format.

■ Thanks to Mike Dailly for extra information on www.dmadesign.org



▼ The Spectrum version was less colourful but the stages very pretty faithful to the Amiga original.

Lemmings

LET'S GO!

Format: Amiga/ Various Home Systems
Release: 1990
Publisher: Psygnosis
Developer: DMA Design

It's a popular myth that lemmings are daft rodents that commit mass suicide whenever their numbers grow too large. Despite being untrue (Disney's filmmakers imported the poor creatures to Canada and then herded them off a cliff for the filming of *White Wilderness* in 1958), the urban legend did provide DMA with inspiration for its superb *Lemmings* game.

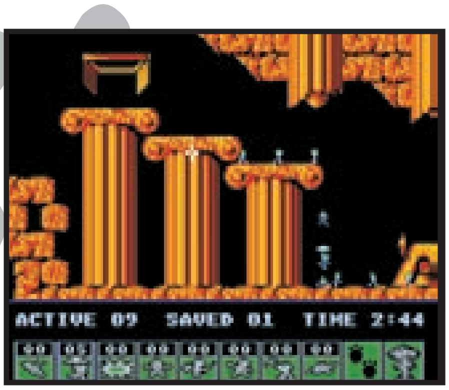
As in many of the greatest puzzle games, the aim of *Lemmings* was wonderfully simplistic, yet fiendishly addictive and the game was impossible to stop playing. A hatch opens up on each level and hapless Lemmings start to fall to the ground, their goal to reach the exit at the end of each level. Being rather foolish, the rodents simply walked in a straight line, only changing direction when they hit something, until they reached either their destination or a sticky end. Flames, pools of water, industrial grinders and deadly falls were just a few of the many hazards your hapless rodents had to negotiate, and a keen mind and quick reflexes were needed to find the appropriate route in order to get your group of furry dimwits to safety.

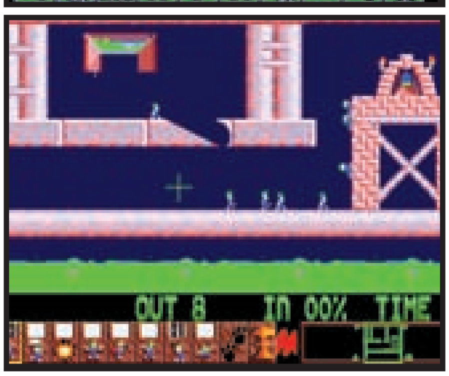
At the start of each level you were presented with a set of changeable skill levels that ranged from Fun to Mayhem (although more were included on the later console versions) along with a set number of Lemmings and the percentage that had to be kept alive. Along the bottom of the screen was a useful map (most levels in the game were several screens wide), a nuke button (for restarting levels) and a pause icon (represented by a pair of paws).

Also on screen were eight distinct icons that represented a unique Lemming skill. Diggers could plough through most surfaces at an astonishing rate, Blockers stopped Lemmings from walking into death traps, while Floaters could fall from any height without dying. Once the required skill was selected, it was then a simple matter of clicking on the appropriate Lemming to give it the relevant skill.

Upon receiving his new skill, your targeted Lemming was able to dig in several directions, scale vertical surfaces, build bridges (although if you weren't careful, he'd quickly run out of wood) or even blow himself up. Before long, with some careful planning on your part the little guys had negotiated the level's many hazards and had a clear line to escape and victory.

Of course, when you had a continual stream of Lemmings intent on walking to their doom things tended to get rather tricky, so deft manipulation of your mouse was needed if you didn't want your cuddly





SO MANY VERSIONS…

Rodents are well known for their breeding skills and the Lemmings from DMA were no different. Versions of the game appeared on practically every console and computer, and although many of the machines lacked mouse support they all worked very well.

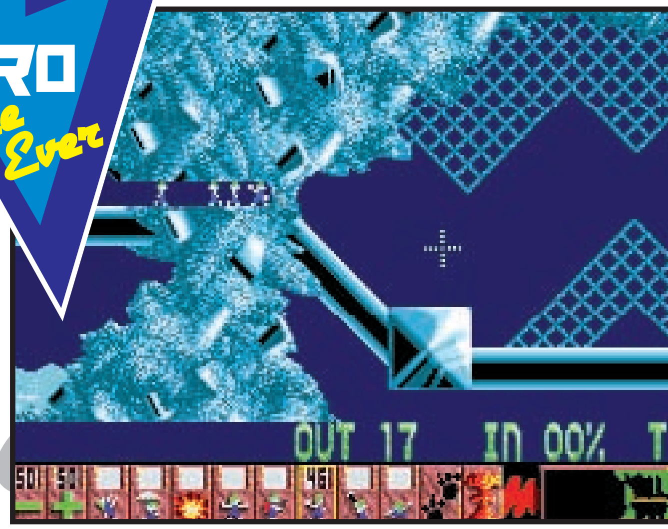
While the Mega Drive and NES versions were of a high standard, the SNES game is our console title of choice. The main difference was that you could cycle backwards and forwards through the Lemming icons with two buttons; other versions saw you having to hold down a button and scroll via the D-pad – much more fiddly.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about the many ports of *Lemmings* is just how good they all were. Granted, they didn't have to rely on fancy aesthetics, but the control interface must have been a real pain to convert.









▲ Skilful pummelling will see your Lemmings escape this ice-bound cavern. Then again, seeing as you're only allowed to imbue your Lemmings with bashing skills on this level, you don't have much choice…

critters to meet an untimely end. To make matters worse, you were often given a set amount of skills to bestow on your Lemmings, so any chance of continually using Blockers to contain your Lemmings while a select few cleared the level was hardly ever an option. While it was possible to slow the flow of Lemmings from the opening trap door to a steady trickle, you were only delaying the inevitable. Sooner or later you were going to be overrun with the buggers and when you were dealing with up to a hundred of the little critters your nerves soon got stretched to breaking point.

Even though the game could get incredibly frustrating (especially on the more difficult settings) trying to save your Lemmings was an incredibly rewarding experience and it became impossible to put down. Sure, it had far from revolutionary visuals (although all the Lemmings featured some fantastic animation and did look rather cute), and the levels looked liked they'd been knocked out in a bit of a rush, but the somewhat crude look of *Lemmings* simply added to its charm – which it had in spades.

In keeping with the game's upbeat pace, DMA had also come up with some fantastic tunes to spur the action along. Usually re-jigged versions of classic nursery rhymes or songs, they sounded absolutely superb and perfectly suited the on-screen chaos. DMA even saw fit to throw in a few voice samples like the opening 'Let's go!' to the doomed 'Oh no!' of an exploding Lemming.

It's easy to criticise *Lemmings* – get stuck on one level and you'd be unable to get any further, causing much hair-pulling and teeth-gnashing – but to do so seems churlish. *Lemmings* remains an incredibly satisfying game that perfectly mixes skill, frustration and humour to great effect. If you don't like what is arguably one of the greatest games of the early Nineties then give it one more go – you might be pleasantly surprised.

EVEN MORE LEMMINGS

Like many popular titles, *Lemmings* has received numerous updates over the years and several interesting spin-offs. *Oh No! More Lemmings* had a new skill rating, ten additional two-player levels and new visuals, while *Lemmings 2: The Tribes* gave you a staggering 52 Lemmings to choose from and 12 distinct tribes. *3D Lemmings* took the loveable rodents into the third dimension (and lacked much of the old charm as a result) while *Lemmings Paintball* saw your furry critters engaged in a massive paintball fight. In all, 12 official *Lemmings* games have been released, with many more unofficial efforts being created by the series' fans.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1990



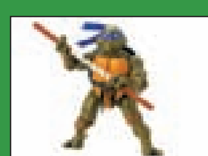
FASHION VICTIM

So what if it made you look like the Michelin Man? A puffer jacket kept you warm, and most importantly, made you look bigger then you were, putting an end to schoolboy beatings.



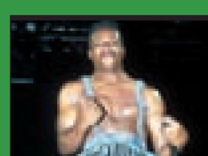
AT THE MOVIES

Yes, he's gone off the boil, and so Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas* remains his greatest film (and one of the best films of the Nineties for that matter). All together now: "Funny how?"



TOP TOY

Although they first appeared on TV in 1988, Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles became insanely popular in 1990 and became every child's most-wanted Christmas toy.



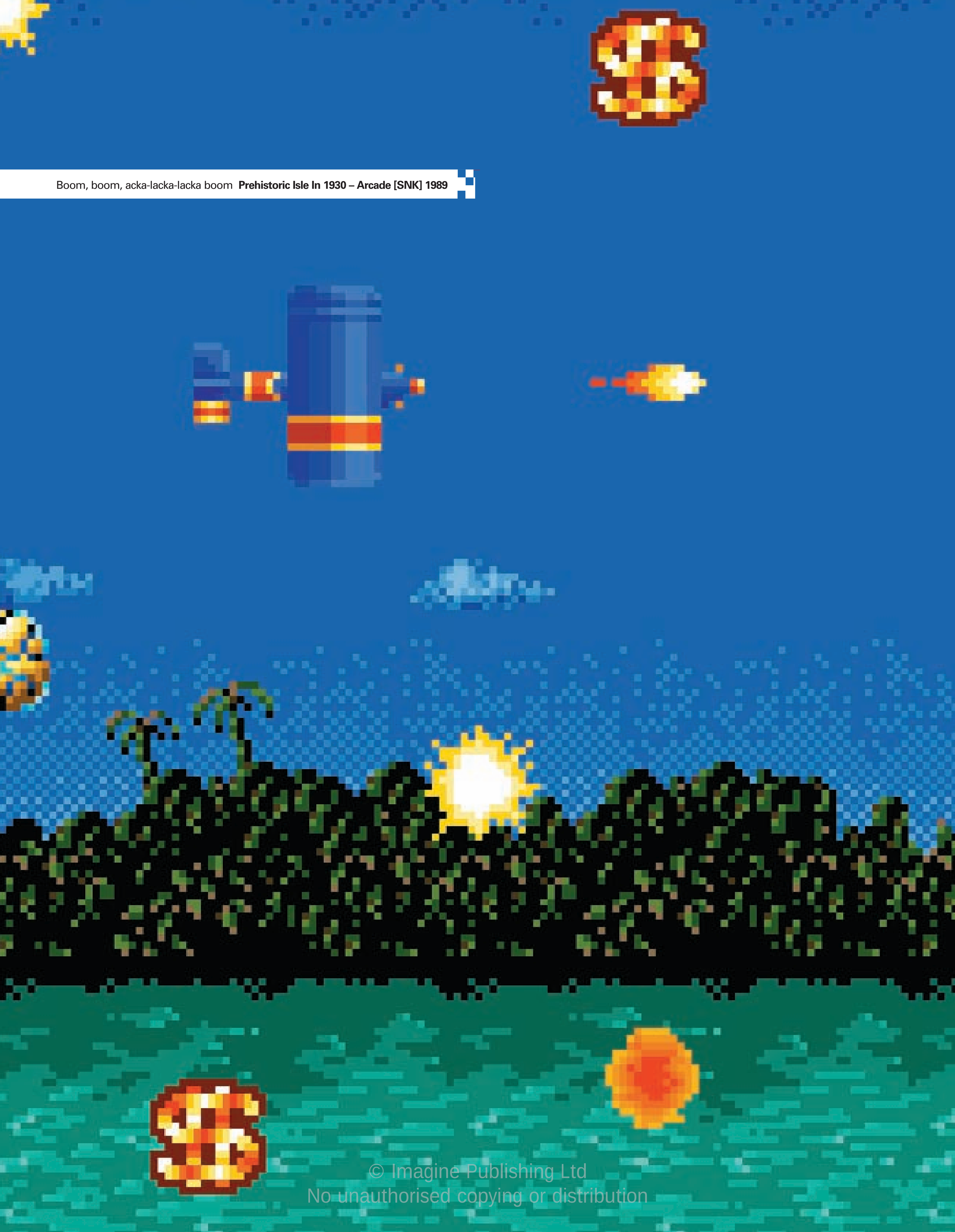
ON THE RADIO

Who could forget the baggy pants and outrageous dance antics of MC Hammer? We can't, no matter how much we try… And believe us – we do try.



CARTOON HEROES

Originally starting off on the Tracey Ullman show, The Simpsons became so popular that they eventually received their own show that's still running today.



Boom, boom, acka-lacka-lacka boom **Prehistoric Isle In 1930 – Arcade [SNK] 1989**



GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT

WE ATTEMPT TO REWRITE THE HISTORY BOOKS BY SALUTING THOSE CLASSIC GAMES THAT HAVE FALLEN BY THE WAYSIDE



Snake, Rattle 'N' Roll

Release: 1990
Format: NES
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Rare

If Rare's output could be summed up with one game, *Snake, Rattle 'N' Roll* would would probably slither off with the award before anyone could stop it. Featuring impressive visuals that belied the host hardware, a surreal sense of humour and some extremely hard (yet rewarding) gameplay, *Snake, Rattle 'N' Roll* is vintage Rare. What a shame that hardly anyone ever mentions it…

Released on the NES in 1990, *Snake, Rattle 'N' Roll* was an isometric platformer that saw you control a hungry snake who had to make his way up a mountain in order to reach the moon. This boiled down to slithering around the detailed and very bizarre landscapes, eating as many Nibbley Pibbleys as possible.

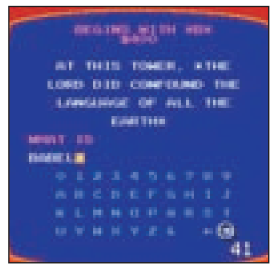
Although they started off as small coloured balls, the Nibbley Pibbleys evolved as the game went on and took many odd forms. Hopping around on springs, sprouting legs and running away and even developing wings were just a few of the strange creatures' defences, and great skill was needed in order to catch them all (especially those damn quick yellow ones). Fortunately, your heroic snake was incredibly agile and would quickly head in whatever direction you sent him.

There were plenty of enemies to dodge throughout the surreal landscapes and the tight controls made the game a joy to play. Of course, the isometric viewpoint did present a few problems (especially when jumping on certain stages) but it was much better implemented than in other games in the genre, which is no surprise as Rare always was the master of isometric 3D.

Although your Snake started off as just a head, munching on Nibbley Pibbleys would see him get longer and fatter. Capture Pibbleys of the same colour as your snake – or better yet, grab the more powerful yellow Pibbleys – and your reptile would pile on the pounds even faster. When enough of the little critters had been eaten, you needed find each level's set of scales and leap on them. If you had gained enough weight, you could move onto the next stage; fail and it was back to more Pibbley munching.

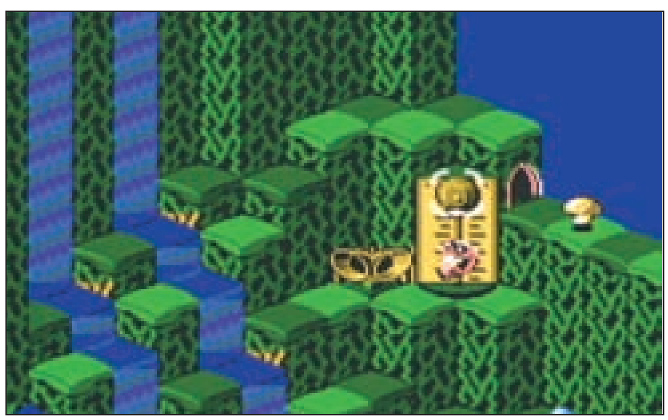
Like Rare's previous titles, this game was steeped in quirky humour and had a unique charm. Large, disembodied feet would appear and attempt to crush you into oblivion, toilet seats chased you through the isometric landscapes, and straying into the many stretches of water would see you chased back to shore by a hungry shark, complete with a homage to the *Jaws* theme tune.

Add a strict time limit, a highly competitive two-player mode, plenty of secret warps and some increasingly complex level design and Rare had ensured that *Snake, Rattle 'N' Roll* still stands apart from its peers. Along with the likes of *Cobra Triangle* and *R.C. Pro-Am*, this title proved just how versatile Rare was, and it was part of a creative streak that continued well into the life of both the SNES and N64.



Although best known for its Spectrum, SNES and N64 output, Rare made dozens of titles for the NES, and among well-known titles such as *Battletoads* and *R.C. Pro-Am* you'll find the likes of *Slalom*, *Silent Service* and *A Nightmare On Elm Street*. Though not up to the standards associated with Rare, many of them are still worth playing – but give *Jeopardy!* and *Sesame Street 123* a wide berth…





GREAT GAME BOSSES…

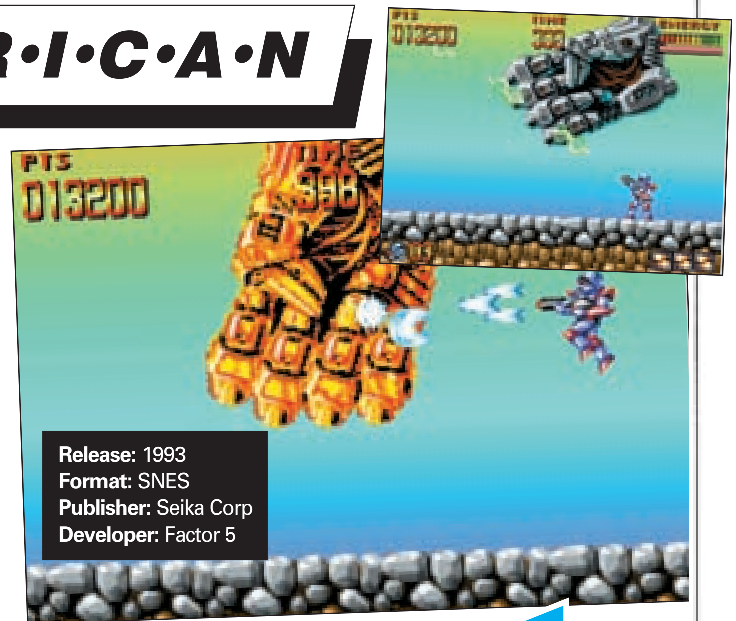
S•U•P•E•R T•U•R•R•I•C•A•N

With *Turrican* converting successfully to the 8- and 16-bit computers, hopes were high that the SNES version would be similarly accomplished. And these hopes were fulfilled as *Super Turrican* turned out to be every bit as good as the titles that had preceeded it. Need further proof? Then simply check out the first boss in all its Mode 7 glory.

After making your way through an incredibly frantic first level that saw you blasting everything from small insects to power-up pods, you found yourself resting your trigger finger and marvelling at the serenity around you. Sadly, this moment of peace was quickly interrupted by the arrival of a large metal gauntlet.

Bracing yourself for the battle ahead, your jaw dropped in amazement as the gauntlet expanded until it had taken up a quarter of the screen (good old Mode 7). Unperturbed by its sudden growth, you started blasting it to hell while looking for a way to defeat it.

Then without warning the metal-clad hand rotated through 90 degrees and smashed you into the ground. Caught off guard, you took a huge amount of damage and moved as far away from the crazed fist as possible. Before long, though, you had the gauntlet sussed, and with a few nifty moves (not to mention some judicious firepower) your metallic foe was soon nothing more than a bad memory.



Release: 1993
Format: SNES
Publisher: Seika Corp
Developer: Factor 5

▲ As if the appearance of a giant floating fist wasn't bad enough, it wants to kill you.

P•I•L•O•T W•I•N•G•S

Year: 1993
Format: SNES
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-House

Earning flight certificates may not sound like a great idea for a game, but when it's executed as well as Nintendo's *Pilot Wings* it's impossible to complain. Featuring astonishing Mode 7 visuals, *Pilot Wings* saw you flying various devices in order to secure your coveted certificates and become the ultimate pilot.

Whilst the first level consisted of nothing more than mastering the landing of a bi-plane and taking part in a little bit of sky diving, later levels got progressively trickier. Our favourite, though, has to be the wonderful serenity of level three. The previous stage saw you adding the Rocketbelt to your repertoire of flying contraptions, but nothing could prepare you for the all-out beauty of wheeling through the sky in your hang-glider.



▲ A spot of hang-gliding – the perfect antidote to today's drive-by-laden, whore-beating violence-fests.

Like the other tasks you had to complete, it should have been a simple task of guiding your glider to the desired landing point and moving onto the next level. As you soared through the air, though, you soon forgot the task at hand and just wanted to glide about to your heart's content. As the impressive Mode 7 landscape rotated lazily below you, your cares were forgotten as you flew around.

Inevitably, gravity beckoned and you were forced to start your descent. At the last moment, though, you were able to grab an air current and you could once again take majestically to the air. Magic, sheer magic…



SPOILING FOR A FIGHT, WE PUSH UP OUR SLEEVES, POLISH OUR KNUCKLE-DUSTERS AND LOOK BACK AT OUR FAVOURITE SCROLLING FIGHTERS

IT STARTED WITH A FIST

Once upon a time, it was impossible to walk into an arcade or visit a friend's house without playing at least one scrolling fighter before you left. From pummelling your mate senseless in *Double Dragon*'s climax to cutting a brutal swathe of destruction through Capcom's *The Punisher*, scrolling fighters delivered an exhilarating experience that was often unmatched by other genres and helped to hide their often short playtime, linear level design and simplistic gameplay.

As the years progressed and gamers' tastes changed, the scrolling fighter evolved with them, although the principal objective – defeat as many opponents as you can – always remained the same. Indeed, titles like *Final Fight*, *Streets Of Rage 2* and *Guardian Heroes* all helped take the genre in new and exciting directions (especially in the case of Treasure's *Guardian Heroes*) and it's a species that seems to be in no danger of dying out.

Titles like *Dynasty Wars 4*, *Kung Fu Chaos* and *Viewtiful Joe* are just a few of the more recent games that continue to evolve or even revolutionise the genre and while it might not be as popular as it was in the mid Eighties and early Nineties, it's obvious that the scrolling fighter is here to stay.

"Gentlemen, welcome to Fight Club"

In no particular order, we present ten of the greatest scrolling fighters ever made. Of course, it's impossible to list every title (even in the Family Tree on page 140) but the games we have chosen either set new standards in the genre or were simply great fun to play. If there are any particular favourites you think we've missed out, don't hesitate to contact us at the usual address…

▼ You walk along, you meet people, you batter them senseless – it's a timeless formula.









Retro Feature

KUNG FU MASTER



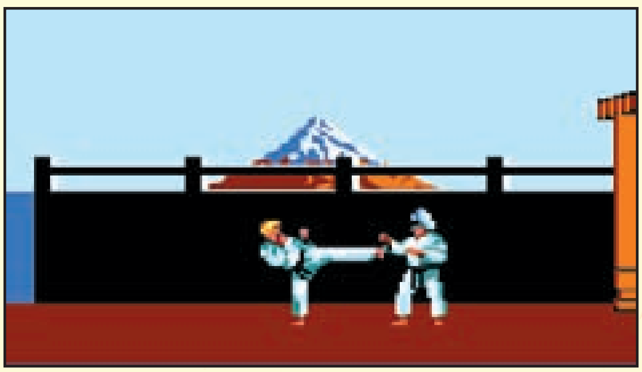
Technically, Taito's *Fighting Roller* meets the requirements for being crowned the first scrolling arcade fighter; for many, though, Irem's *Kung Fu Master* (called *Spartan X* in Japan and based on a Jackie Chan film of the same name) is the game that really got the genre rolling.

While its gameplay was as simple as its plot – rescue your girlfriend from a gang of thugs – *Kung Fu Master* was gripping stuff. From the off you were assaulted by wave upon wave of henchmen, with their sole purpose being to take your health. Should a goon get too close, he'd start depleting your precious energy bar. Frantic joystick waggling would shrug him off, but there were plenty of others to take his place.

Knife throwers, snakes and even dragons were just a few of your opponents, but all paled in comparison to the bosses at the end of each stage. Hard as nails, they were normally more than strong enough to send you back to the beginning of the stage. You didn't mind, though – it was just another excuse to punch and kick for all you were worth…

▲ Your lovely lady friend, Silvia, was depending on you to give these pyjamaed goons a good shoeing. What more reason do you need?

Developer: Irem
Format: Arcade
Release: 1984



KARATEKA

First released on the Apple II in 1984, *Karateka* was the stunning debut by *Prince Of Persia* creator Jordan Mechner. Featuring wonderfully smooth animation, a compelling story and some great cut-scenes, this was unlike anything else around.

Your character had a decent array of moves and looked superb as he executed his kicks and punches. Indeed, the fluid animation made for some wonderful gameplay and it was a real shame whenever a fight ended.

Developer: Jordan Mechner
Format: Apple II
Release: 1984

While there were only three locations to fight through, they were fairly expansive and contained plenty of enemies. Perhaps the most impressive aspect of *Karateka* is how well Mechner integrated his story into the game – the tale enthralled you with its well-placed music and dynamic cut-scenes. This was a defining moment for the genre.

TARGET RENEGADE

Okay, so only the Commodore 64 version actually scrolled, but this was arguably the greatest 8-bit fighter ever made and is fondly remembered by many gamers.

Though it added little to the genre, *Target Renegade* was made with such panache that you couldn't help but be impressed. Teaming up with a mate (unless you had the C64 version) you'd fight your way through seductive women of the night, burly bikers and some vicious dogs until you reached your nemesis, Mr Big. You had some great moves – kneeing your opponents in the nuts still makes us smile – and a variety of weapons ensured your character's knuckles didn't get too bruised.

Aside from its great visuals and sound, what really made *Target Renegade* so enjoyable was the satisfaction you got from joining up with a friend and causing massive amounts of mayhem. Imagine allowed you to run rampant, and while the cartoony visuals were in stark contrast to the violent action, the concept worked superbly. Sure, it ripped off everything that came before it, but *Target Renegade* filled us with such joyful exuberance it would be wrong not to include it.

Developer: Imagine
Format: Various
Release: 1988



▲ Time for the rain to come and wash those lowlifes off the streets – and you're the rain. No, really, you are.





▲ Get a friend along to help and the pair of you can pummel a range of undesirables. Some would say community rehabilitation would be better for them, but there's no arguing with meathead fighters.

DOUBLE DRAGON

Developer: Technos
Format: Arcade
Release: 1987

When *Double Dragon* appeared in 1987, it was a huge breakthrough and set new standards for future scrolling fighters (at least until *Final Fight* came along).

The addition of a second player was a great touch and really gave you a sense of camaraderie as you fought your way through the game's four stages. Three different fire buttons allowed you to pull off an impressive array of moves and it was even possible to perform a devastating headbutt by double tapping the joystick left or right. Unfortunately, the headbutt and the elbow (for those who mastered it) totally unbalanced the game and made it too easy to complete. Still, if you were willing to ignore these powerful moves there was a nice selection of weapons to use (we've never got bored of throwing sticks of dynamite about), a decent range of enemies to defeat and some rather cool music.

Thanks to great gameplay, colourful visuals and instant accessibility *Double Dragon* went down a storm and went on to spawn seven other games. Although it feels slightly dated by today's standards and is stupidly easy to beat, we can't deny the impact it had on us when we first played it.

STREET GANGS

Developer: Technos
Format: NES
Release: 1989

Playing two school kids who decide to take on rival street gangs might not be the most politically correct idea today, but it was no problem for *Street Gangs* back in 1989. After Ryan's girlfriend is captured, he teams up with best mate Alex in order to kick some high-school butt.

Not content with allowing you to use a variety of weapons, *Street Gangs* also allowed you to pick up various items and throw them at your enemies for extra damage. Even your mate could be thrown at oncoming foes (although he'd take a little damage in the process) and you could guarantee that a scrap would soon break out whenever there were no enemies on screen.

What really made *Street Gangs* stand out though was its RPG elements. Once an enemy had been defeated, he'd leave behind money; you could then buy a range of food and items, which in turn would increase your stats. It was even possible to buy special moves although they cost a fair amount.

Re-entering the chunky world of *Street Gangs* is an enjoyable experience and the game's still extremely playable.



▲ High-school kids knocking seven bells out of each other? It's all perfectly healthy, you know.

GUARDIAN HEROES

Developer: Treasure
Format: Saturn
Release: 1989



Although well known for its addictive shoot-'em-ups and platformers, Treasure wasn't averse to dabbling in other genres and its first beat-'em-up was an innovative tour de force with stunning visuals, superb music and hectic gameplay.

Like *Karateka*, *Guardian Heroes* was driven by its plot – a fascinating tale that unfolded over five different endings. The real beauty of the game, though, was its great gameplay and blistering arcade-style action. As well as having light and hard attacks and a multidirectional block, you could summon magic abilities – handy when you saw the amount of enemies you had to face.

Fortunately, to help you deal with your foes, Treasure supplied you with a huge undead skeleton. Impervious to attack, your bony friend became an invaluable ally. Add combo attacks, the ability to leap into the back- and foreground to continue fighting, and an extensive levelling up process and *Guardian Heroes* was so ahead of its time, it hurt.

STREETS OF RAGE 2

Developer: Sega
Format: Mega Drive
Release: 1993

Bigger, better, faster – that's *Streets Of Rage 2* in a nutshell. After laying down some impressive groundwork with the original, Sega's sequel was one of the defining scrolling fighters of the 16-bit era.

Although apparently killed at the end of the first game, Mr X survived and kidnapped Alex in order to lead Blaze and Axel into a trap. Fortunately for the two friends, two comrades had joined them: muscly Max, and Skate, a rollerskating kid with some devastating attacks. All four fighters had a great range of special moves, could join up to unleash more powerful attacks and looked better than ever. Indeed, the huge sprites of *Streets Of Rage 2* were a world away from the puny characters of the first title, and marked a big step forward for Mega Drive titles. Our only gripe is that it was way too easy to complete.





▼ Yet again, a lack of policemen on the beat means scum-fighting falls into the hands of musclebound, tooled-up citizens. For shame.



FINAL FIGHT



Developer: Capcom
Format: Arcade
Release: 1989

When the vicious Mad Gear gang kidnaps mayor Mike Haggar's daughter, Jessica, the ex-wrestler-turned-civic leader grabs Jessica's squeeze Cody and best mate Guy and sets off for revenge. Each playable character in *Final Fight* had his own strengths and weaknesses, was extremely well animated and could unleash a devastating special attack by pressing the attack and jump buttons at the same time.

The streets of Metro City were teeming with scum and Capcom added some much needed identity to the genre by giving your opponents names and their own energy bars. With fantastic visuals and bone-crunching sound (and some wonderfully intuitive gameplay), it's little wonder *Final Fight* was such a success, spawning a slew of imitators.

Capcom itself was one of the major offenders and constantly revisited the genre it had effectively reinvigorated. Often imitated, but for many never bettered, *Final Fight* is as playable today as it ever was.

GOLDEN AXE

Developer: Sega
Format: Arcade
Release: 1989

Along with *Final Fight* and *Double Dragon*, *Golden Axe* is arguably one of the best-known scrolling arcade fighters. Controlling either a tenacious dwarf, ferocious barbarian or nimble Amazon, you had to negotiate a series of imaginative levels and track down the evil Death Adder. You had to face off against huge giants, massive sword-wielding knights and deadly skeletons until you eventually faced the deadly tyrant himself.

As well as being handy with melee weapons, each character was also able to unleash some potent magic. Gilius the Dwarf had mastery over lightning, Ax Battler could call upon awesome earth magic, while the Amazon Tyris Flare would unleash devastating fire attacks. Characters could boost their magic by collecting potions, or by beating up the pixies that appeared during the game.

If going round on foot didn't appeal, you could hop on a mythical beast and continue the carnage in a frenzy of fireball hurling and tail thrashing. Later console and arcade sequels failed to capture the magic of the original, but *Golden Axe* will always have a place in our hearts.



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES



Developer: Konami
Format: Arcade
Release: 1989

With the cartoon series proving so popular, it was inevitable that an arcade game starring those lovable turtles would turn up. Fortunately, rather then simply ride on the licence, Konami created a highly enjoyable brawler that allowed up to four players to compete at once.

From the moment the catchy theme tune blared out of the speakers, you knew Konami wouldn't disappoint and you were soon facing off against hordes of Foot ninjas and well-known enemies like Be-Bop, Rocksteady and Shredder. Having all four turtles fighting at the same time was a huge bonus, and even when the screen was full of characters there was virtually no slowdown.

Enemies came at you thick and fast and you needed skilled reflexes (and plenty of button bashing) in order to finally reach Shredder. Like many other fighters of the time, the gameplay was straightforward, but the game was so much fun it didn't really matter.

Scrolling beat-'em-ups

family tree

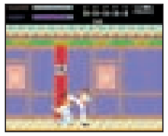
Once insanely popular, the scrolling fighter is only now starting to make a comeback with titles like *Viewtiful Joe* and *Double Dragon Advance*. Spanning 20 years and some fantastic classics (along with some real stinkers), we take a look back at the genre's chequered past.

PROJECT A



- MSX
- 1984
- Is Jackie Chan the patron saint of scrolling fighters? Along with *Kung Fu Master*, *Project A* was an early scrolling fighter based on one of his films. It's extremely simplistic next to *Karateka*, but still good fun. Finding a copy may prove hard, though…

KUNG FU MASTER



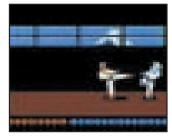
- Arcade
- 1984
- Called *Spartan X* in Japan and based on a Jackie Chan film, *Kung Fu Master* featured hordes of enemies and some rock-hard gameplay. Foes would come at you thick and fast, so steady nerves and quick reflexes were needed.

FIGHTING ROLLER



- Arcade
- 1983
- A scrolling racer where you played a guy on rollerskates may not sound like a great place idea, but it *is* a scrolling fighter. Admittedly, you'd often travel for ages without meeting an opponent but when you did, fisticuffs were bound to ensue.

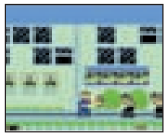
KARATEKA



- Apple II, Various
- 1984
- Before *Prince Of Persia*, Jordan Mechner struck gold with this beauty. Featuring neat play mechanics and a plot told entirely with music and cut-scenes, *Karateka* was like nothing else around and was definitely a more cerebral fighter.

LICENCES

MY HERO



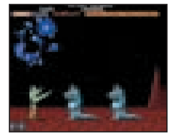
- Arcade
- 1985
- Although it was a laugh being able to knock bottles into multiple enemies and send them flying off screen, *My Hero* was just way too tough. Like *Kung Fu Master*, you faced loads of enemies, but the lack of an energy bar made it annoyingly difficult.

RENEGADE



- Arcade
- 1986
- Ditching the school gang aspect of the original Japanese version, *Renegade* got a grittier, more urban look for the west. With a nifty combat system that gave you a cool back attack, this was a superb fighter.

GUARDIAN



- Arcade
- 1986
- *Guardian* saw you control a giant robot that had to free six planets by defeating their bosses. Sadly, it was pretty poor with rubbish animation and ropey visuals – the screen constantly scrolled even if you weren't moving, which was frustrating.

BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA



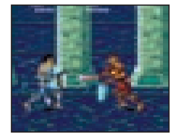
- Various
- 1986
- While it had some nice touches – like switching between three characters – this was a duff movie licence. With dull gameplay and pathetic graphics, we've included *Big Trouble* so you can all laugh at it for being rubbish. Watch the film instead.

DOUBLE DRAGON



- Arcade
- 1987
- Two-player action, a surprise twist and some great weapons made for one exc ellent title. It was far too easy to complete but *Double Dragon* revitalised the genre. Sadly, most of the home versions were rubbish and didn't do this great game justice.

GLADIATOR



- Arcade
- 1986
- *Gladiator* was a bizarre cross between a one-on-one beat-'em-up and a scrolling fighter. It featured a nice combat system that saw you attacking your opponents with different sword thrusts and featured huge, impressive sprites.

ROCK 'N RAGE

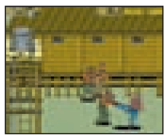


- Arcade
- 1986
- When their lead singer is abducted by a huge demon, it makes sense for the band's guitarists to go after her. Featuring a multi-scrolling playing area and masses of enemies, *Rock 'N Rage* was a quirky fighter, but still quite enjoyable to play.

FANTASY

MISCELLANEOUS

P.O.W.: PRISONERS OF WAR



- Arcade
- 1988
- Prison breaks are never easy, but when you're in a SNK game at least they're fun. Not content with beating up hordes of soldiers? It's possible to grab dropped guns in order to carry on the carnage. Great visuals and tight gameplay made this a winner.

BAD DUDES VS DRAGON NINJA



- Arcade
- 1988
- Throwing more ninjas at you than was strictly healthy, *Bad Dudes* was another great urban brawler. It didn't add much to the genre, but was great fun and had some cool digitised speech. And who could forget that ride across the giant truck…?

TARGET RENEGADE



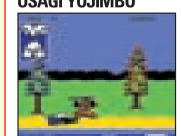
- Various
- 1988
- If only every 8-bit fighter had been as great as *Target Renegade*. With its cartoony visuals, over-the-top violence and superb gameplay, this was simply fantastic. Spectrum and Amstrad versions didn't scroll but had a great two-player mode.

ALTERED BEAST



- Arcade
- 1988
- Although rather boring, Sega's *Altered Beast* featured some lovely transformation sequences that saw you changing into powerful beasts like Werewolves and Dragons. Also received a so-so Mega Drive conversion.

SAMURAI WARRIOR: THE BATTLES OF USAGI YOJIMBO



- C64
- 1988
- *Usagi Yojimbo* is one of those titles that makes you glad to be a gamer. Fantastic music, great cartoony visuals, in-depth gameplay and the ability to play as a samurai rabbit meant this was excellent.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES



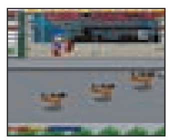
- Arcade
- 1989
- Four-player action, stylish visuals and some great tunes made Konami's Ninja Turtle game very hot property. It seemed like every arcade had at least one Turtle machine and who could blame them? The SNES titles were superb too.

SPLATTER HOUSE



- Arcade
- 1989
- While horror had been used in titles like *Kyros*, it had never been as visceral as the carnage in *Splatter House*. Taking control of a Jason Vorhees look-alike, you dispensed all manner of unpleasant baddies and gruesome bosses.

DYNAMITE DUX



- Arcade
- 1989
- Trust Sega to take the gritty urban setting of many scrolling fighters and add cute ducks and bouncing moose heads… Bright visuals, hilarious enemies and great bosses were just a few delights that *Dynamite Dux* had to offer.

FINAL FIGHT



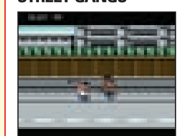
- Arcade
- 1989
- With *Final Fight*, Capcom created a blueprint for all future fighters. Massive sprites, superb gameplay and plenty of neat features ensured *Final Fight*'s reputation remains untarnished to this day. Just don't mention the SNES one-player game…

GOLDEN AXE



- Arcade
- 1989
- Thieving pixies, devastating magic and exotic locations were all in Sega's *Golden Axe*. Being able to knock foes off their bizarre steeds and steal their rides was a great touch, and some of the bosses were massive. A true classic.

STREET GANGS



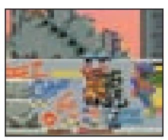
- NES
- 1989
- *Street Gangs* saw you teaming up with your best mate to rescue your girlfriend from rival gangs. Cute (if somewhat dumpy) characters and some nice RPG elements (such as increasing stats and buying special moves) made for a great title.

CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE AVENGERS



- Arcade
- 1991
- This was a by-the-numbers scrolling fighter. Drab visuals, uninspired gameplay and dull enemies meant this was one for the hardcore fans only. Getting help at different stages from other superheroes was a nice touch, but it simply wasn't enough.

CRUDE BUSTER



- Arcade
- 1990
- With so many scrolling fighters out in the late Eighties and early Nineties, gimmicks were needed to stand out. Being able to throw parts of the scenery about was a nice touch, but there was little else to enjoy in this average fighter.

THE COMBATRIBES



- Arcade
- 1990
- The varying skills of each character were neat, but what really made this game stand out was its superb visuals and some ridiculously violent gameplay. Bashing heads together and swinging your enemies into their mates was all in a day's work.

STREETS OF RAGE



- Mega Drive
- 1990
- Featuring hordes of enemies, a smashing techno soundtrack and a great two-player mode, *Streets Of Rage* was a two-fingered salute at the single-player *Final Fight* on the SNES. The characters were a bit weedy, but great bosses saved the day.

THE SIMPSONS

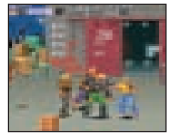
- Arcade
- 1991
- Featuring all our favourite Simpsons characters and some kick-ass gameplay, Konami's fighter is still played today. The ability to team up with another player was a great touch, but the characters and great action really made *The Simpsons* so good.

SENGOKU

- Arcade/Neo Geo
- 1991
- Despite making some great one-on-one fighters, many of SNK's scrolling fighters for its Neo Geo were a bit sub-par. *Sengoku* was little more than an average looking title held together by some decidedly flimsy gameplay.

CAPTAIN COMMANDO

- Arcade
- 1991
- For many, Capcom was king of the scrolling beat-'em-up and this was yet another terrific example to cement the fans' claims. Vibrant graphics, nasty violence and sublime controls continued to show other developers how to make great games.

VENDETTA

- Arcade
- 1991
- The follow-up to *Crime Fighters* was another violent brawler that had vastly improved visuals, some nice new features and great tunes. It's not very often that dogs on heat in a game would attack you, but *Vendetta* made it all possible.

CADILLACS & DINOSAURS

- Arcade
- 1991
- Based on the popular comic, *Cadillacs & Dinosaurs* saw you facing off against poachers in order to save captured dinosaurs. Attack the reptiles and they'd turn on you, although you could always escape in your Cadillac…

NINJA CLOWNS

- Arcade
- 1991
- If you think the name sounds stupid, wait until you play the game. Featuring a unique look and some Monty Python-esque humour, *Ninja Clowns* is one of the weirdest scrolling fighters that we've ever played and is well worth hunting down.

THE PUNISHER

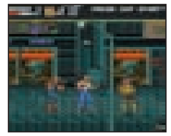
- Arcade
- 1993
- Capcom's *The Punisher* was a brutally violent fighter that perfectly captured the anti-hero it was based on. Featuring buckets of blood, some nasty moves and hordes of enemies, the action came thick and fast and so did the excitement.

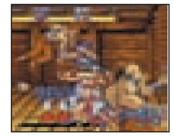
KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND

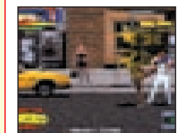
- Arcade
- 1992
- Based on the Knights of the Round Table, this was yet another Capcom fighter. Featuring plenty of sword-swinging action and some great animated characters, this and *King Of Dragons* were ideal blueprints for Capcom's D&D titles.

RUSHING BEAT

- SNES
- 1992
- Fans of *Final Fight* felt at home with Jaleco's spin on the popular fighter. With similar locations and enemies to Capcom's brawler, this was more rip-off than homage. The sequels upped the ante with more players, better visuals and more moves.

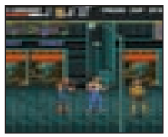
STREETS OF RAGE 2

- Mega Drive
- 1993
- Apart from being too easy, Sega's sequel got everything right and delivered one of the greatest beat-'em-ups of the 16-bit era. Massive sprites, great new characters, fantastic sound and cool new moves meant this was wonderful.

ARABIAN FIGHT

- Arcade
- 1992
- Although its gameplay was fairly generic, Sega's *Arabian Fight* stood out thanks to its graphical style. The game was full of impressive scaling techniques, with characters leaping off screen in an attempt to stop you in your tracks.

GUARDIANS OF THE HOOD

- Arcade
- 1992
- The only thing that made this stand out was its *Pit Fighter*-style digitised graphics. Sadly, even this couldn't save it from being a rubbish fighter and it soon slipped into obscurity. Only worth playing again if you want a good laugh.

ALIEN VS PREDATOR

- Arcade
- 1994
- Capcom has been accused of churning out identikit fighters but when they're as enjoyable as *Alien Vs Predator*, why grumble? The CPS II board delivered some stunning visuals and the gameplay was madder than ever. It was fairly easy but had depth.

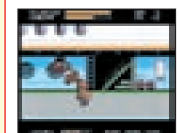
STREETS OF RAGE 3

- Mega Drive
- 1994
- Sega's third outing onto those rage-filled streets was business as usual and despite having some unusual characters, little made it stand out from its peers. It now goes for high amounts on eBay, but that's more due to its original rarity in the UK than its quality.

BATTLE TOADS & DOUBLE DRAGON: THE ULTIMATE TEAM

- NES
- 1993
- After finding some success in arcades with *Battle Toads*, the amphibians made their way to the SNES and NES. This NES outing saw the toads teaming up with the *Double Dragon* brothers and was a hit.

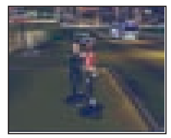
D&D: TOWER OF DOOM

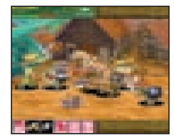
- Arcade
- 1993
- Using the Dungeons & Dragons licence in a beat-'em-up was a stroke of genius. Though only two players could play at once, *Tower Of Doom* boasted superb visuals, a great new magic system and plenty of monsters from the D&D franchise.

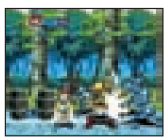
MIGHTY FINAL FIGHT

- NES
- 1993
- Parodies of games have always been popular and *Mighty Final Fight* was no different. Cartoony sprites that perfectly captured the sprit of the original characters, some cool little tunes and great gameplay made this an enjoyable NES game.

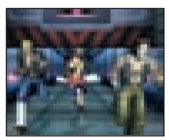
DIE HARD ARCADE

- Arcade
- 1996
- Also known as *Dynamite Deka* in Japan, this wasn't the most accurate of movie tie-ins but it was very enjoyable. Bold visuals combined nicely with the frenetic feet-and-fists action to create a title that we couldn't help but pump 10ps into.

FIGHTING FORCE

- Various
- 1997
- By the late Nineties, the scrolling fighter was pretty much dead and this was one of the best efforts we could find. Basically a 3D stab at *Streets Of Rage* and *Final Fight*, this was a fairly enjoyable title that failed to add anything new to the genre.

D&D: SHADOW OVER MYSTARA

- Arcade
- 1996
- Four players on screen as well as two brand new characters were just a few of the delights in Capcom's D&D sequel. The gameplay was as strong as ever and there were plenty of new spells to use and monsters to fight.

GUARDIAN HEROES

- Saturn
- 1998
- It's typical that one of the greatest beat-'em-ups ever appeared on a machine that hardly anyone cared about. Treasure redefined the genre and added plenty of innovation to what had become a rapidly stagnating genre.

THE BOUNCER

- PS2
- 2001
- Proof that even the mighty Square could slip up, *The Bouncer* was a derivative title that promised much but delivered little. There's no doubt that it looks and sounds stunning, but the gameplay was as dull as ditchwater and it was over far too quickly.

DYNASTY WARRIORS

- PS2
- 2001
- One of the greatest things about the *Dynasty Wars* series is how far it's progressed in such a short time. Fighting through hordes of enemies is tremendous fun and the strategy elements found in *Dynasty Warriors 4* make this a must-have.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

- Various
- 2003
- Like many old fads the Turtles are popular again, so Konami made another stab at capturing the glory of its original fighters. The home versions didn't add anything new but the GBA version was completely different and much more enjoyable.

SPIKE OUT: BATTLE STREET

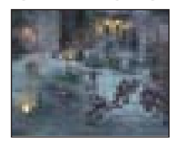
- Xbox
- 2004
- Although little has been revealed about it, we have high hopes for Sega's brawler. The original arcade game was great fun and if this is still going to offer online play, it could provide just the shot in the arm that the genre needs.

VIEWTIFUL JOE

- GameCube
- 2003
- Trust Capcom to totally reinvent the scrolling beat-'em-up and do it with such style. It might be tough, but *Viewtiful Joe*'s stylish visuals, insane combos and gripping gameplay quickly grab you and refuse to let go.

DOUBLE DRAGON ADVANCE

- GBA
- 2003
- Despite featuring updated visuals and all-new game modes, we couldn't really get excited about *Double Dragon Advance*. It might have been the annoying button layout, or the fact that it's still too easy to complete, but we definitely prefer the original.

LOTR: THE RETURN OF THE KING

- Various
- 2003
- Featuring superb presentation, an all-star cast and plenty of cut-scenes from the film, this was EA's second *LOTR* title. Although the game featured a two-player option, the camera caused problems and the gameplay was as generic as ever.



THE PICKFORD BROTHERS

interviewed by DARRAN JONES

In the cut-and-thrust world of the games industry, it's rare to find a business association that has lasted over 20 years – especially when both partners are brothers… We catch up with John and Ste Pickford to chart their two decades of designing, developing and innovating

Any gamer worth their salt should be familiar with John and Ste Pickford. Over the last 20 years the brothers have swum against the industry tide and delivered a series of quirky and original titles across a variety of formats. Transfixed with videogames since the early days of the industry, the pair have run their own studios, worked with big names in UK development, and were the first in Europe to work with certain gaming platforms. But, as with so many stalwarts of programming and design, the Pickfords' first gaming experiences were with some classic titles and machines of old.

"I was hooked on videogames almost from the moment they first appeared – *Space Invaders* or Atari's *Sprint* are probably the first games I actually saw," Ste says. "I found them puzzling at first because my only experience of arcade machines were fruit machines or *Penny Falls*, and they all involved trying to win money somehow. The lack of a 'prize' slot on the machine and the concept of games which you paid money to play, but no matter how well you do you can never win your 10p back, was strange at first." Strange it may have been, but Ste, like his older brother, was smitten; by the time John got his first Spectrum ZX81 in 1981, the brothers were struck with the gaming bug.

John was the first to break into the gaming industry by getting a job at the newly formed Binary Design in Manchester in 1985. He was a programmer and earned "the princely sum of £6,000 a year". A year later Ste came to do some work experience at Binary, where he started off designing some loading screens and ended up staying an extra week in order to design more. So impressed was boss Andy Hieke with Ste's work that he decided to hire him. "I was the head of the art department by the start of 1987," Ste recalls.

GOING THEIR OWN WAY

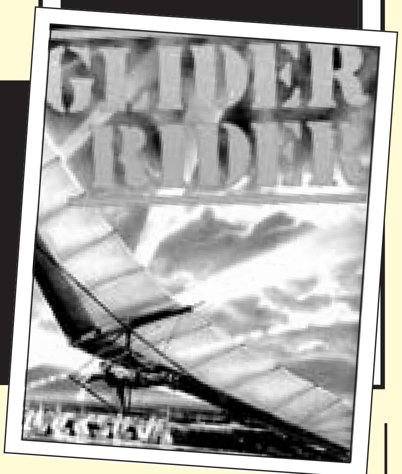
John and Ste quickly built up an impressive portfolio of titles that included the likes of *Glider Rider*, *Amaurote* and *Feud*, and the brothers worked on an impressive average of one new game every two months. After two years, however, the Pickfords upped sticks and formed their own studio, Zippo Games, to work on the Amiga and Atari ST. After just two titles (*Cosmic Pirate* and *Voodoo Nightmare*), Zippo joined forces with Rare and began working on titles for the NES – which, at that time, was unknown in Europe.

The brothers found the transition from computers to the new breed of consoles quite a revelation, not least because of the new standards of quality control they encountered. "Not only were the games so, so much better, they were all bug-free and finished," Ste marvels. "Most computer games of the time were really just riffs on a single idea, not often properly crafted into full products. Console games… were designed to be played and enjoyed for much longer. For computer titles we used to just increase the speed value on every new level, until presumably the game would crash or become unplayable – we didn't know because we couldn't play games that well."

BROTHERLY LOVE

Despite the many pressures associated with the gaming industry, the Pickfords insist they've never had any problems working with each other in such close proximity. "There's never been any competition," John says. "We have completely different skills, so we've pretty much always worked together quite naturally."

"We've always worked together from the time I started at Binary Design," explains Ste. "When John was making games at home, however, he didn't let me get involved much at all. Ultimately, we have complementary skills, and think the same way, so we're more like one solid unit than two people working together."



"It was the sheer professionalism and polish that was required that made the change so different," John adds. "Games actually got tested, no bugs were tolerated and it was expected that a game could actually be completed. It was a big learning experience and very valuable."

Zippo's partnership with Rare proved interesting for the Pickfords; not only were they one of the first studios to get their hands on NES development kits before anyone else outside Japan (producing the legendary *Solar Jetman* in 1989), but they were the first developers in Europe to begin work on the Game Boy. Rare bought out Zippo at the end of 1989, renaming the studio Rare Manchester. John claims it was thanks to Rare that he and his brother really "got into" consoles, but despite learning a lot from the Twycross-based developer, Ste's memories aren't all happy.

"Rare were great to work with on an even footing, when we were a company being subcontracted to do work for them," reveals the younger Pickford, before explaining that it was a different story after the buyout. "They were over-strict, imposing arbitrary rules from 'head office' which weren't in the best interests of the studio. It became very miserable very quickly."

Clearly not happy with their situation, the brothers moved over to Software Creations in 1990 (where they got to play with one of the first SNES development kits in Europe) and they created titles such as *Plok!*, *Equinox*, *Maximum Carnage* and *Tin Star*. They were also involved with early work on the N64 – an art package called *Creator* was later modified to become *Mario Paint 64*, though it only got released in Japan.

SOLO STUDIO SUCCESS

Eventually, however, the brothers once again yearned for their own studio and in 1996 Zed Two was created, though the early days weren't easy. "Setting up Zed Two was very difficult," confirms Ste. "What we were trying to do – develop fresh, original IP and new game ideas with a small, dynamic and focused team – was totally against the flow of what the rest of the industry expected. No publishers want original games, they only want clones of current hits. They also don't want small independent studios – they want you to be big with hundreds of staff and millions of dollars in the bank, so if the game is late or they need it early they can insist you chuck another 20 or 30 staff at the game, and when they don't pay you for 6-12 months you don't have them over a barrel by insisting they have to pay you or you'll go bust."

"It was very hard in the early days," agrees John. "Ste and I had to live on very little for the first year or so, although things gradually got easier as cash flow improved and at

SOFTOGRAPHY

Two decades of design

Glider Rider *(Quicksilva), ZX Spectrum | Amstrad CPC | Commodore 64 – JP: Designer, Programmer; SP: Loading Screen, Font 1986

***180* (Mastertronic), ZX Spectrum | Amstrad CPC | Commodore 64 – SP: Lead Artist 1986**

***Zub* (Mastertronic), ZX Spectrum | Amstrad CPC | Commodore 64 – JP: Designer, Lead Programmer; SP: Lead Artist 1986**

***Feud* (Mastertronic), ZX Spectrum | Amstrad CPC | Commodore 64 – JP: Designer; SP: Lead Artist .. 1987**

***Amaurote* (Mastertronic), ZX Spectrum | Amstrad CPC | Commodore 64 – JP: Designer, Programmer; SP: Lead Artist 1987**

***Cosmic Pirate* (Palace Software), Amiga | Atari ST – JP: Designer, Lead Programmer; SP: Lead Artist 1988**

***IronSword (Wizards & Warriors II)* (Acclaim), NES – JP: Designer; SP: Designer, Lead Artist 1989**



▲ *Tin Star* was an enjoyable (albeit fairly limited) lightgun title that used the SNES' massive SuperScope, for that authentic Wild West, um, rocket launcher effect…

THE PICKFORD BROTHERS



▼ *Aqua Aqua* was the PS2 sequel to the N64's *Wetrix* and had the same fiendishly addictive build-pools-of-water-and-then-evaporate-them gameplay.



one point we were doing very well indeed. Sadly, we were hit by two non-paying publishers, which pretty much wiped our reserves."

Nevertheless, the Pickfords have fond memories of their two studios and cite them as their most enjoyable working environments. "I know it was my own company," says Ste, "but we had a very enjoyable, productive and creative atmosphere going, and had just about the best team of 20 or so people I've ever seen. It's a crying shame that such a strong and productive unit has now been broken up."

We'd have to agree, because the founding of Zed Two saw the Pickfords' ideas blossom and it was easy to see the direction they were intending to take. You only have to look at the likes of *Wetrix* and *Aqua Aqua* to realise that the studio held plenty of promise; *Wetrix* in particular is a classic example of how the brothers' experimentation with ideas would eventually evolve into a full game. "I was really interested in interactive environments and one of the ideas kicking around was simulating water," says John. "Originally we were planning on using the system as part of a bigger game but when we got it working it seemed to have potential, so we spent a month creating the basic game prototype."

The 'bigger' game in question was going to be called *Vampire Circus*, but the Pickfords were busy having fun with the water technology. "We wanted to simulate water and fire and other elements," says Ste. "Water came first and the technology demo was so much fun, and we needed a deal so badly, that we decided to cheekily turn that into a game, then hopefully return to *Vampire Circus* later."

ZED'S DEAD, BABY…

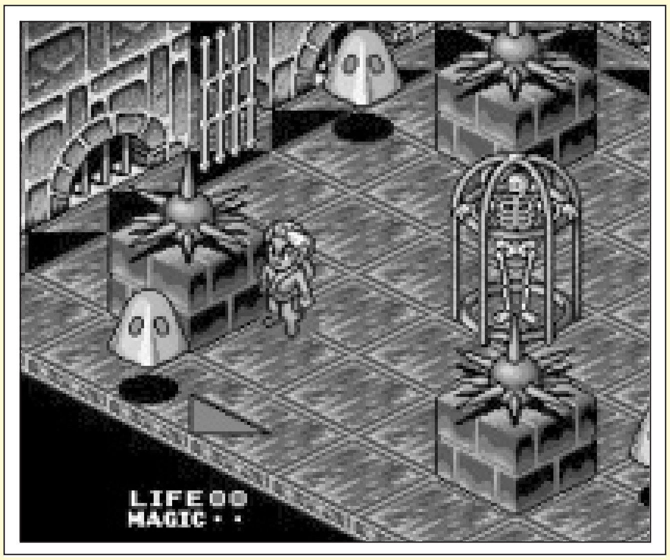
The Pickfords never got round to finishing *Vampire Circus* as Zed Two was bought by Warthog in 2002, only to be closed down just over twelve months later in February this year. Understandably, the brothers have found this frustrating, not least because they've been severed from some of the work they consider to be their best. "We've got better over time, so I'm more proud of our more recent titles – *Sticky Balls* and *Pillage* I'm very proud of," says Ste. "I'm so proud that we managed to get an original game with original IP to market in to the current industry climate, which is very, very hostile to such products. *Wetrix* and *Aqua Aqua* I'm also very proud of because, again, we managed to get an original game to market and keep ownership of the IP with Zed Two at a time when this was considered pretty much impossible without a big hit or lots of funding behind you (we had neither). What's disappointing is that after so much personal struggle and effort to keep the ownership of these IPs with Zed Two, John and I have now been separated from Zed Two and have now lost the rights to the games that we put so much into."

What's particularly galling is that *Sticky Balls* is now in development for Sony's PSP (a video of the game was shown at E3 this year), but the Pickfords will never see the fruits of their labours. "Sadly, I've lost the rights to that game and any involvement with its ongoing development, which is probably the most frustrating thing that's ever happened to me," says John.

With this in mind, it's hardly surprising to learn that the brothers are planning to go independent again. Last April, the pair set up Zee-3 so they can distribute their own games online. The site isn't live yet, but it will let them work on the titles that they want to make, which has always been their aim. "I'm proud of the games where we got a chance to express our ideas," reveals Ste. "Sure, they were all compromised one way or another by time and budget constraints or publisher interference, but generally we did better work when we were left to it."

Having owned their own studios before, though, they know that they may have a tough time, particularly in the current industry climate. "It's almost impossible to get funding for an original game nowadays," laments John, "and judging by the lukewarm critical response to *Future Tactics* [the Pickfords' current title] it seems production values and licences are valued more than interesting gameplay and ideas. Nowadays, to reach the market a game has to fit neatly into an existing category whilst providing the correct number of unique selling points. The only hope for fresh, exciting games seems to be the indie scene. I think a lot of frustrated game designers and programmers are looking at the internet as a way of reaching an audience for their work."

It's a thought that's mirrored by Ste. "The industry's got better and worse in different ways at the same time," he says. "It's better in terms of the quality of games and talent of the people involved, the



▲ The sequel to *Solstice*, *Equinox* improved on the original game in every way possible.

HOW TO GET AHEAD

Despite taking computer studies at school, the Pickfords found they picked up more programming knowledge at home. "To be honest, anyone with their own ZX81 or Spectrum was way ahead of anything taught on our course," says John. "I would say I'm largely self-taught, although I've learned a lot from the people I've worked with over the years." For Ste it was more complicated; with the computer studies O-Level course full, the younger Pickford found himself stuck in business studies and used his first mock exam to write a comic strip explaining why he was refusing to complete the test. The gamble paid off and Ste was able to take the course. Despite being told it was impossible to take the final exam, as he was two years behind the other students, Ste went ahead anyway and got an A.

professionalism, time and money available, and the place videogames have secured in our culture. It's far worse in terms of the opportunities and freedom afforded to game creators by the industry. Actually making games in a commercial environment is generally a pretty depressing and demoralising experience in most cases, especially if you have any ambitions to make good and interesting games that don't happen to match exactly what marketing's flavour of the month is this month."

BACK TO THE FUTURE?

Frustrations aside, John and Ste are determined to carry on making the kind of games that they want to play and have even considered doing a George Lucas and returning to some of their older titles. "It is an idea we're toying with for now," admits Ste. "Some of those games have great ideas that were poorly implemented or not thought through well enough at the time. I wouldn't want to do a remake that wallowed in nostalgia. I'd rather a proper modern remake which brought the ideas bang up to date."

"A lot of our old Speccy games aren't that good, but there's a good idea at the heart of them," agrees John. "I'd love to take games like *Zub*, *Feud* or *Glider Rider* and develop them properly." With interest in retro gaming booming, they could be onto a winner. In the meantime, however, it seems the brothers are more than happy to drink beer, watch movies, play games and spend time with their families, while planning their next moves in the industry. And when they're back, we'll be there at the front of the welcoming party.

SOFTOGRAPHY CONT.

Solar Jetman: Hunt For The Golden Warpship **(Tradewest), NES | PlayChoice 10 – JP: Designer; SP: Designer, Graphic Artist........1989**

Wizards & Warriors III **(Acclaim), NES – JP: Executive Producer; SP: Designer, Graphic Artist........1990**

Solstice 2 **(Epic / Sony), SNES – JP: Designer, Lead Programmer; SP: Designer, Lead Artist........1990**

Plok! **(Tradewest), SNES – JP: Producer, Designer; SP: Art Director, Designer........1992**

Ken Griffey Jnr Presents Major League Baseball **(Nintendo), SNES – SP: Lead Artist........1993**

Maximum Carnage **(Acclaim), SNES | Genesis – JP: Producer, Designer; SP: Art Director........1994**

Tin Star **(Nintendo), SNES – JP: Producer, Designer; SP: Art Director, Designer........1994**

Wetrix **(Ocean), Nintendo 64 | PC – JP: Designer, Lead Programmer; SP: Producer, Lead Artist........1996**

Aqua Aqua **(Imagineer), PlayStation2 – JP: Designer; SP: Executive Producer........2000**

Future Tactics [aka Pillage] **(Crave Entertainment), PlayStation2 | GameCube | XBox – JP: Designer; SP: Executive Producer........2001**

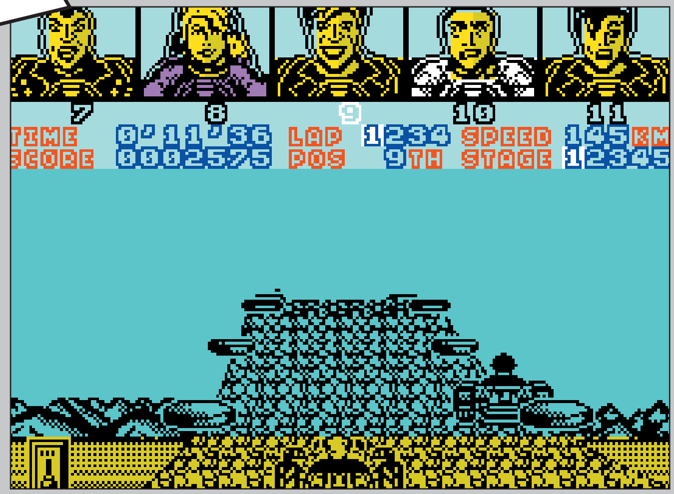
Sticky Balls **(N/A), PC | Pocket PC – JP: Designer, Programmer; SP: Designer, Producer, Artist........2002**



▲ Created under Rare, *IronSword* was basic but enjoyable. And Fabio was the star of the box art. Result.

CLASH OF THE TITANS

P.O.W.E.R D.R.I.F.T



As gaming infiltrated the home market, a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre, machine or even a developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all that opposed him. First recorded in playgrounds in the early Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine, or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of petty squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month, we look at the 8-bit computer versions of Sega's over-the-top racer *Power Drift*.

ROUND 1: VISUALS

COMMODORE 64: Although the C64 version looks pretty ugly, it manages to move along at a fair old lick and in doing so creates a great feeling of speed. The tracks themselves look rather sparse and lack some of the detail of their 8-bit peers, but as far as capturing the speed of the original goes, no other version comes close. The winner by a country mile…

SPECTRUM: To be honest, none of the 8-bit systems were going to be able to emulate the sheer thrill of Sega's fun racer, but at least each machine tried its hardest. Although the Spectrum version lacks the vibrant colours of its peers, it features large, cartoony sprites and a reasonably convincing sense of speed. A solid effort.

AMSTRAD CPC 464: Despite having the most colourful visuals and firmly capturing the look of the original game, *Power Drift* on the Amstrad fails to convince once you actually start playing. Your racer chugs along at a very sedate pace and lacks some of the excitement and sensation of speed that the C64 and Spectrum versions manage.

WINNER: COMMODORE 64
RUNNER UP: SPECTRUM

ROUND 2: AUDIO

COMMODORE 64: There's a clear winner in this department, mainly because this is the only version to have its own in-game music. The C64's SID chip has been put to great use and delivers some bouncy tunes and convincing spot effects. It's still early, but the C64 version is already racing ahead of the pack.

SPECTRUM: Starting off with the jaunty title tune, *Power Drift* on the Spectrum actually sounds really nice. There's a decent array of sound effects on offer, and while it can't match the sonics of the C64 version, this is surprisingly competent.

AMSTRAD CPC 464: This is more of an improvement. Though there isn't any in-game music, the title tune is a lot livelier than the Spectrum's and features much more solid spot effects. It's still a ridiculously long way off from the aural excitement of the arcade game, but that was always going to be a tall order. A respectable second behind the superlative C64.

WINNER: COMMODORE 64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

COMMODORE 64: Tight collision detection and some responsive controls are just a few of the joys you'll encounter when playing *Power Drift* on the C64. While it's safe to say that none of the computers are powerful enough to do the original arcade game justice, the C64 version at least proves itself to be a very competent racer.

SPECTRUM: Although very enjoyable, there are a few problems that stop the Spectrum version from taking the overall top slot. Collision detection is sometimes a problem and you'll often find yourself clipping opponents that you're actually well clear of. It's a small niggle, though, and *Power Drift* is otherwise great fun.

AMSTRAD CPC 464: Unfortunately, the same problem that destroyed *OutRun* on the Amstrad has again raised its ugly head and has severely dented this machine's chances. The sheer lack of speed totally kills any excitement you might be able to amass while playing and you're quickly left with a very dull racer that fails to do the game or the CPC any justice.

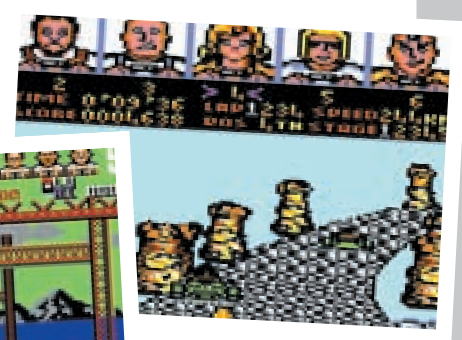
WINNER: COMMODORE 64
RUNNER UP: SPECTRUM

AND THE WINNER IS…

With three straight wins, it couldn't really be anything else but the Commodore 64. With the likes of *Gryzor, Renegade* and *Chase HQ* all proving to be extremely poor arcade conversions, we're pleased that *Power Drift* has finally gone some way to redressing the balance.

Commodore 64

▼ With superior sound, visuals and gameplay, *Power Drift* on the C64 is the best version.







POWER DRIFT (Arcade) Sega, 1988 – Japanese arcade flyer

Hurt me plenty...

Fear, paranoia and frenetic action. Gamers take these factors for granted today, but without an unassuming shareware game called Doom we would still consider corpulent plumbers and accelerated hedgehogs the pinnacle of gaming expertise...

Contemporary gamers are in danger of becoming complacent. As the industry has forged ahead through ideologies and technological progression, we now take for granted such factors as multiplayer, intense, tactical action and a climate of palpable suspense. And well we should; especially with *Doom 3* looming ever nearer. Since its 1993 debut, *Doom* has appeared on shows such as *ER* and *Friends*, and achieved as much controversy as success. So just how many of the lodestones of modern gaming do we owe to *Doom*?

To understand the creative genesis of *Doom*, and therefore that of modern PC games, you need to comprehend the disparate minds behind it: John Carmack and John Romero. As a child, Romero was astounded by the supra-reality portrayed in (then) cutting-edge games such as *Asteroids*, the first-person *Battlezone* and the mainframe computer text world of *Colossal Cave Adventure*. Like Romero, the insular Carmack thrived in a vicarious life, experienced via Dungeons and Dragons, fantasy novels and 'virtual world' games. Their collective desire for immediate and immersive escapism, which they believed was epitomised in the Holodeck of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, would eventually form one of the most influential games of the modern age.

Meeting as coders at a small shareware company, Romero and Carmack began to fuse into a creative mass, with Carmack as the technical genius and Romero the 'ideas man' who fleshed out the dynamics of Carmack's game engines and mechanics. Their first games – the popular *Commander Keen* titles – inspired them to defy the limited hardware of the late Eighties. Romero and Carmack wanted to not only push back



the boundaries, but shatter them beyond recognition. They sought to fuse the 'maze action' of games such as *Gauntlet* with the 3D world of *Wing Commander* and *Elite*. While *Doom* and id did not invent the first-person game per se, they aimed to make it into something explosive and visceral.

The template for *Doom* was found in id's *Wolfenstein 3D*. Romero wanted *Wolfenstein 3D* to be "a totally shocking game", which it was. From the health gauge and bloodied facial representation to the array of weapons, the intense action and the 'push wall' secret areas, *Doom* was all but present in *Wolfenstein 3D*. All that was now required for id's next game was the schlock horror found in *Evil Dead 2* (a favourite film of Romero and Carmack) and, perversely, a bit of Tom Cruise. *Doom* owes a debt to the film *The Color of Money*. Carmack was watching it and noticed a scene in which Tom Cruise's character saunters into a pool hall carrying a custom cue in a case. A punter asks Cruise what he has in the case, to which he coolly replies: 'Doom'. id's next game crystallised.

Mars Attacks

To try to fully appreciate the impact of *Doom*, you have to understand that it not only redefined the way games were made, but the way they were played. *Doom* began life as a two megabyte shareware download, and the id servers were rapidly clogged as millions of eager users struggled to download a copy. Romero and Carmack had enjoyed commercial success with their previous games, but they soon began to realise that *Doom* was serious. Plot and narrative were attenuated in favour of the concentrated carnage, and the story within the game seems almost an afterthought. As Carmack opined during the creation of *Doom*: "Story in a game is like story in a porn movie; it's expected to be there, but it's not that important.'

The 3D engine it employed was peerless at the time, almost transgressing the ▷

> "Doom 3 finds itself imperilled by an advanced and more cerebral gaming environment that it directly and indirectly fathered"

It All Starts Here

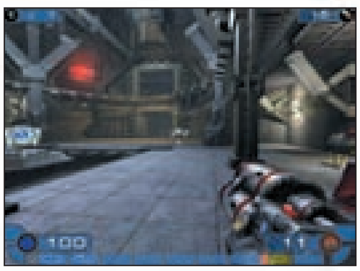
HOW THE INNOVATION INSPIRED OTHERS

Shareware

When the first nine levels of *Doom* were released on the University of Wisconsin's FTP site demand was so great that the id team were unable to sign onto the servers when they arrived for work the next day. Although only around a million copies of *Doom* were actually sold, it's estimated that around 15-20 million gamers have downloaded the shareware version.

Licensing

The *Doom* engine was the first 3D graphics engine to be licensed out to other developers and gamers, and even today its influences can still be seen. Recent examples of games that use the *Unreal II* graphics engine include *Deus Ex: Invisible War, Thief: Deadly Shadows* and *Dead Man's Hand*. The licensing of engines is a major contributing factor to mod games being so popular as well.



Multiplayer

Doom was the first title to allow two gamers to link up and play the same game via LAN or the internet. It's also responsible for the huge surge of interest in online gaming in general. This was later cemented by the arrival of games such as *Quake* and *Unreal Tournament*.



FPS Firsts

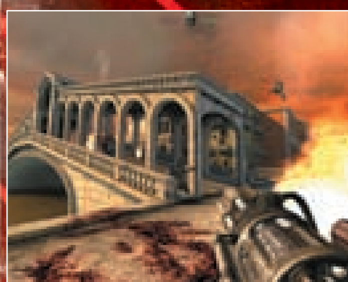
Doom paved the way for first-person shooters, and before long many other PC shooters were plundering the game's impressive list of innovative ideas. Using lifts, searching out key cards and the use of brutal weapons (such as the wonderful Shotgun) were just a few of *Doom*'s delights.

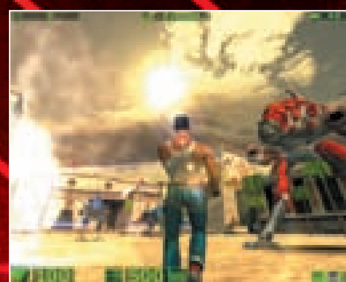


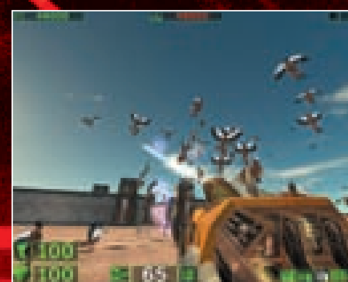
Bring Out The Imp

WILL THE WORLD EVER SEE A TRUE SUCCESSOR TO DOOM'S LEGACY?

Ten years on it's plain to see there's still a market for *Doom*'s no-nonsense approach to dealing with the denizens of Hell. With handheld titles embracing 3D technology, the simple FPS will see a new lease of life through titles like *Ashen*, one of Nokia's big hopes for the N-Gage. So be it ports of *Doom* itself or merely copycat products, expect the N-Gage QD, PSP and perhaps even Nintendo's 21st-Century dual-screen system to sport more than a few first-person bloodbaths.







Both *Serious Sam* and *Painkiller* attempt to recapture the 'twitch' style of gameplay that *Doom* pioneered over ten years ago.

technology of the age with scaling sprites, crude lighting effects and startling, clean texture maps. Microsoft even used a port of *Doom* to promote Windows 95. The illusion of speed and depth that *Doom* presented was such that some gamers complained of motion sickness while playing, a hitherto unknown phenomenon. Part of the sheer speed of the game engine was due to a coding concept of Carmack's called raycasting – a technique in which the PC draws only the graphics seen on screen, rather than the whole world, leading to much-improved performance. A truly revolutionary idea.

> "To understand the impact of Doom you have to realise that it not only redefined the way games were made, but the way they were played"

What *Doom* offered in terms of action, it doubled in fear. The cunning stereo separation kept engrossed gamers on the knife edge of tension as the dark ululations of the lurking hellspawn piqued anxiety to a frenzied pitch. We expect this feeling in modern games, but for those experiencing *Doom* in 1993, it was a sensory revolution; Romero and Carmack's virtual world made terrifyingly real and present. The game engine could comfortably handle numerous enemies at once, making for intense battles. *Doom* even featured rudimentary AI, and the sly player could make the enemies fight amongst themselves (a vital tactic when faced with almost insurmountable odds). Modern FPS games live and die by their AI constructs, and without the AI of *Doom* it can be argued that modern action games would be little more than linear shooting galleries of imbecilic foes.

The fraught, real-time battles in *Doom* had never been seen in games before, and the concept of action was redefined. The fun-loving Romero wanted to evoke the inner child of every gamer, and *Doom* managed that feat perfectly. The sheer simplicity of *Doom* explains why it has weathered the years with greater dignity than many more 'progressive' FPS titles – Romero and Carmack knew a game had to be fun.

Doom invented the 'deathmatch' (the word itself was coined by Romero). Until the inception of *Doom*, the multiplayer game was a slow and frustrating experience, played via costly modems or computer networks. The mainstays of multiplayer gaming before *Doom* were multi-user dungeons (MUDs) – text-based roleplaying adventures with the interaction marred by the lack of any graphical interface. Even with MUDs, the core gameplay was co-



operative or single-player; it was *Doom* that let us meet new people and dismember them, not work with them. Network *Doom* transformed an explosive single-player game into a legendary multiplayer one. id jokingly claimed that the game would be "the number-one cause of decreased productivity in businesses around the world." Its prophecy came true, and firms worldwide banned *Doom* outright.

Without *Doom* conceiving the multiplayer deathmatch, it could be radically touted that the PC today would be an abandoned platform insofar as gaming is concerned. Indirectly, via id's *Quake*, *Doom* also contributed to the rise of the cyber-athlete and the international gaming tournament. No longer was gaming a quasi-social pursuit. Via the prizes on offer in these 'tournies' (including one of Carmack's very own Ferraris), it became a populist and lucrative one, with victorious gamers reaping the kudos of a rock star. The irony is that given that *Doom* is remembered mostly for 'inventing' the multiplayer experience, the multiplayer mode was almost overlooked, and rushed into the game just a few weeks before release.

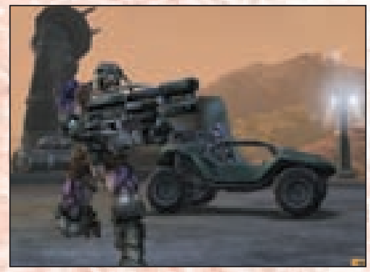
Doom was also the first game to actively encourage user-created modifications, the genesis of the modern modding community. Within months of the creation of *Doom*, assiduous coders and hackers had created a ream of mods, altering every element of the game beyond recognition. It was Carmack's vision that was again responsible for the incredible enthusiasm for *Doom* modding. The mod files (or WAD files) did not destroy the game code, they complemented it. The result was a wholly flexible and simple system that any bedroom coder could wrestle with. Many individuals now shaping the future of gaming had their passion sparked via creating their own *Doom* levels. Through the multiplayer and the modding, *Doom* had managed to forge something no other game had: a community. Gaming was no longer a guilty, antisocial pursuit. Thanks to *Doom*, it was a family.

Following up a game as trailblazing as *Doom* was an arduous task for id, and some were disillusioned that 1994's *Doom II* did not expand the series beyond a few additions. None of which mattered to the majority, however, as *Doom II* finally let gamers deathmatch via a modem; unchaining them from networks and turning the internet into a creative tool rather than an interactive reference book, as it primarily was then.

Translation is one of the finest barometers of success, and to date *Doom* has graced virtually every platform in existence. Yet while the series has proliferated, *Doom* was left in the wake of more vibrant imitation games, with console conversions being little more than a rehash of the original *Doom*. Given that the long-term success of the *Doom* games rested on the multiplayer, the console iterations that enforced the single-player experience were destined to fail.

Doom 3 might look more than impressive, but id's efforts to keep it under wraps means it may not meet our expectations…





Doom: Ten Million Fragged

WE'VE COME A LONG WAY, BABY

Something wicked this way comes, in the guise of *Doom 3* – the continuation of the series we have been avidly awaiting for almost a decade. In some respects, *Doom 3* is both a remake of, and homage to, the original *Doom*, albeit completely reconstructed. The atmosphere of paranoia and fear will dominate everything, and the revolutionary graphics engine will ensure that *Doom 3* radiates beauty. However, the FPS genre is saturated with games offering both beauty and terror, embodied in titles such as the *Alien Vs Predator* games. Gamers have evolved with their medium, and *Doom 3* finds itself offering action and atmosphere to an audience expecting more than just an established name; they want tactical involvement along the lines of *Halo*, *Battlefield 1942* and the masterful *SWAT* titles. With the recent *Unreal Tournament 2004* and *Far Cry* fulfilling the needs of gamers, and future titles such as *Half-Life 2* and *Tribes: Vengeance* whetting appetites, some see *Doom 3* as offering too little too late, save some sublimely rendered nostalgia. While tradition alone will endear *Doom 3* to many, the long-anticipated game may yet fail to make the evolving grade it was fundamental in establishing. Let it be said that the gaming world is nothing if not perverse.

Blasting 101

OR 'THE MANY DEATHS OF THE FPS'

As one of the most heavily populated genres, the first-person shooter has been plagued by more than enough mediocre offerings. So by a bizarre process of reverse engineering, we find out what made *Doom* so good and what id will need to do to keep the franchise alive and screaming today. It will need to start by not following these examples…



Exhibit A: Turok Evolution

When a dinosaur-man-thing (or, in fact, any enemy) goes down, the player expects, nay demands, to be able to loot the corpse for weapons and ammo, so seeing both fade away within seconds was the nail in the Dinosaur Hunter's sponsor-covered coffin. Arguably before the days of the truly demanding gamer anyway, *Doom* allowed ammo pick-ups while cunningly sidestepping the issue by virtue of the fact that many adversaries were unarmed, often literally. If you can't slice off a machine gun arm and use it for yourself in the third game, though, it could be a whole different story…

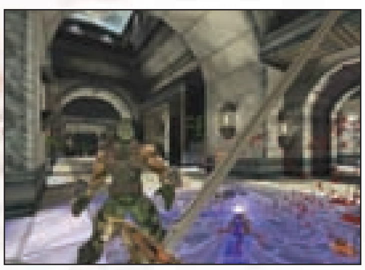


Exhibit B: Daikatana

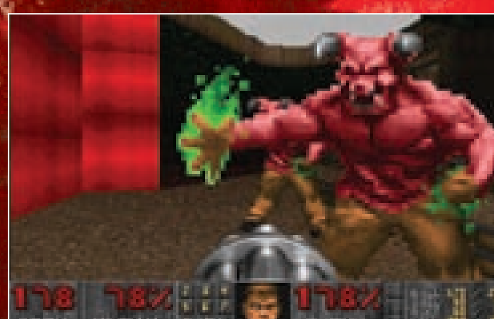
With three years of development and some of the original *Doom* chaps behind it (including a certain Mr Romero), you'd have had every right to expect this to have been another revolution on the scale of *Quake*. Unfortunately, *Daikatana* was cursed with an incredible case of mediocrity and has forever harmed the good name of not just Romero but, indirectly, id Software, finding itself guilty by association. id's 'fall from favour' as it were (saved somewhat by 2002's very respectable *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*) may have an kind of effect on some gamers' anticipation for *Doom 3*, but we'll have to wait until its release to determine to what extent.

Hell On Earth

Perhaps the most fitting statement Romero has ever made about *Doom* is: "It has to be well timed". It certainly was, with atomic clock precision. In 1993, the PC was emerging from a chrysalis and transforming from a business machine into one that ran some astounding games. Given the somewhat costly and hardware-restrictive nature of the PC as it was then, the gaming demographic was an adult one, ensuring that genres such as adventure and strategy were the main preserve. The 'action' game was scantly represented until *Doom* appeared. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and this maxim makes *Doom* the most flattered game in existence. Carmack's altruistic openness with his creative tools led to a rapid incursion of *Doom* clones (the source code was released to the public on 24 December 1997). *Doom*, however, has outlived its imitators with a tenacity rarely seen in contemporary gaming. While we can pinpoint it as the cause of the initial influx of 'me too' FPS titles, it was a modest 1998 game called *Half-Life* that set a new template for plot-focused, intense psychological action.

Doom has courted controversy and success in almost equal measure, and it is still one of the primary games cited when moralistic anti-gamers ascend their soapboxes; but *Doom* did not instigate the controversy over videogames – titles such as Exidy's 1976 arcade game *Death Race* have that honour. Part of the debate was that *Doom* was a 'hardcore' game, played aggressively (especially deathmatch) and intensely. While games such as *Elite* offered almost infinite hours of exploratory, profiteering pleasure, *Doom* was the complete antithesis: fast, immediate and violent. Due to the very immediacy of *Doom*, a new breed of casual gamers flocked to the bloody action. Because of *Doom*, youths were now spending hours at their computers, killing and being killed. They no longer went to the park to play in the fresh air. They played *Doom* for six- or 12-hour stretches, and parents and psychologists began to worry.

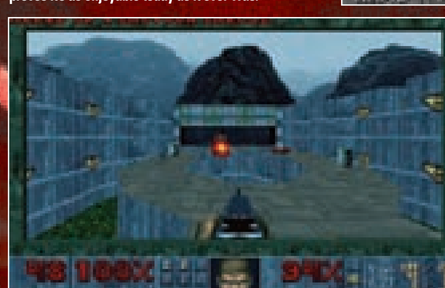
To the non-gaming world, *Doom* is often most associated with the Columbine atrocities. On 29 April 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold killed 12 classmates and one teacher at their high school in Colorado, before turning their guns on themselves. Before committing these acts, Harris recorded himself on video brandishing a shotgun and claiming "It's going to be like… *Doom*. That… shotgun is straight out of *Doom*!" Both Harris and Klebold were obsessed with the game and created their own *Doom* mods. The media, desperate for a scapegoat, blamed the game. For the critics, a violent game led to a violent act, and many swallowed that as truth, despite the frenzied protestations of millions of



Never let it be said that the denizens of Hell didn't have the muscle to back up their efforts to conquer the world – these guys were just plain nasty.



By today's standards, *Doom* looks incredibly primitive, and yet playing for just a short time proves it's as enjoyable today as it ever was.





Would Like To Kill…

With a heavy focus on the multiplayer side of the game, *Doom* paved the way for id's creation of the FPS convention. Offering thousands in prize money and allowing gamers to BYOC (bring your own computer), such events always have huge and fanatical attendances.





The legacy of *Doom* lived on with id's creation of *Quake* – a game that brought thousands of gamers together at deathmatch conventions.

Doom enthusiasts who had never so much as killed an insect. In 2002, federal judge Lewis Babcock dismissed a lawsuit against numerous software companies supposedly 'responsible' for the Columbine tragedy. *Doom* was not engendered to make didactic points about violence. In *Doom*, Romero and Carmack wanted something 'shocking', but also something abstract and oddly detached. Of all the accusations levelled at games for their content, the Imps and Beholders of *Doom* were utterly inhuman, keeping the violence at a truly fantasy level. The gamers understood that. Society, as Columbine proves, did not.

laurels. Despite the adoration he generates from countless gamers, Romero's 2000 FPS *Daikatana* was a failure; bloated, several years late and uninspired. Fame and nostalgia are no longer the golden tickets they once were. The future of *Doom*, however, is partly the future of all software; perhaps the question is 'will *Doom* dictate the future, or meekly follow?' Some claim that the only way for a *Doom* renaissance is for Carmack and Romero to combine their energies once more. Given that they parted ways acrimoniously after the completion of *Quake*, this seems doubtful. However, given Carmack's sense of freedom with his ideas and tools, the future of *Doom* could conceivably be third-party. Whether

> "The Imps and Beholders of Doom were utterly inhuman, keeping the violence at a fantasy level. Gamers understood that, society did not"

Quo Vadis, Doom?

All of this begs the question: 'What now for *Doom*?' Like a protagonist from Greek tragedy, *Doom 3* finds itself imperilled by an advanced and more cerebral gaming environment that it directly and indirectly fathered. Gaming has evolved, and developers can't afford to rest on their

Doom, the innovator of innovators, will continue to make tectonic shifts in the future of gaming, however, remains anybody's guess.

Sources: *Masters Of Doom: How Two Guys Created An Empire And Transformed Pop Culture* by David Kushner (Piatkus Books)



Exhibit C: Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun

'Artificial intelligence' may have been a generous way of describing the process of *Doom*'s enemies running at you and hurling globs of glowing death, so why can't the richest software developer in the world attain this level of AI in 2003? Glaring scripting errors made *Rising Sun* nigh-on farcical in places, and while the bar has been raised by the likes of *Far Cry* and *Halo*, there's still something to be said for the no-frills gung-ho approach of the first *Doom*.

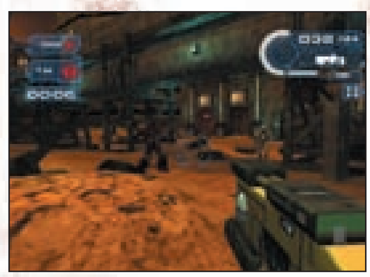


Exhibit D: Fire Warrior

Again, evolution is at fault in making corridor-based level design anachronistic among the sprawling environments of 2004. The pixelated death-bringers of the Nineties classic make the key-collecting shenanigans more acceptable, but how Kuju thought it could repackage the same experience in a shiny recreation of the Warhammer 40,000 universe and get away with it escapes us.



Exhibit E: Postal 2

If ever there was a game that took an idea too far, it would be *Postal 2*. So lost in its own 'hilarious' world, Running With Scissors lost all sense of gameplay elements, balance and, well, everything that makes a game fun to play and purposeful. *Doom 3*'s change in feel from frantic shooting to *System Shock*-esque thrills is fine, but if id takes things too far all hell could quite literally break loose among fans.

GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT

NOW AND THEN, WE CELEBRATE NEGLECTED CLASSICS. THIS MONTH IT'S GIANT GRAM: ALL JAPAN PRO WRESTLING

GIANT GRAM

SEGA SLAMS IT, JAPANESE STYLE

Release: 1997
Format: Arcade, Saturn, Dreamcast
Publisher: Sega
Developer: WOW Entertainment

Don't look at us like that. You know what we're talking about: that look on your face that says you're not into the whole 'men in lycra, punching each other until one falls over' thing. Just because you're not, doesn't mean no one is, does it? You might not want to admit it, but wrestling sells, and although there have been some real stinkers (Acclaim, we're looking at you… or we would be if you weren't already dead), there have also been some corkers when it comes to grappling games. The strange thing is, most of the quality titles have had nothing to do with Western wrestling – for quality, you need to look East.

While the real champion has always been *Fire Pro Wrestling* (also covered in Retro this month), there's no denying that Sega's *Giant Gram* series was also a true masterpiece. Essentially, it was the *Virtua Fighter* of wrestling games – a belief backed by the fact that, initially, *Giant Gram* wasn't called *Giant Gram* at all. Released in 1997 on Sega's ST-V arcade hardware (a trumped-up version of the Saturn architecture), *All Japan Pro Wrestling Featuring Virtua* starred wrestlers from the Japanese wrestling federation of the same name. These included Mitsuharu Misawa, Kenta Kobashi and the legendary Giant Baba, along with a selection of US wrestlers who made the transition to the Japanese stage such as Tommy Ace and Stan Hansen, and the rather odd addition of *Virtua Fighter*'s two grapplers, Wolf Hawkfield and Jeffrey McWild. Despite being an arcade game (later a Saturn conversion), the gameplay wasn't arcade-like – a style that set up the *Giant Gram* series nicely.

AJPW Featuring Virtua sported a move list for each wrestler that read more like a complex beat-'em-up than what you'd expect from an arcade-based grappler. From basic holds to complex combos linked into other moves, reversals and counters, as well as a damage system that let you focus attacks on a specific part of your opponent's body for greater punishment, getting to grips with it took practice and a good memory. That the title still holds up today is testament to the quality of the game's engine, although the series improved considerably as it evolved into *Giant Gram*.

Its move onto Sega's Naomi arcade technology (and then to the Dreamcast) served to improve the game's graphical excellence, although the solid combat system remained similar. Additional options such as two-player tag matches, the addition of wrestlers from Misawa's newly created *NOAH* federation and *Giant Gram 2000*'s Historical Battles, all helped enhance the game and added to its cult status. Indeed, the game was so good that we're confused as to why Sega has never seen fit to use it since the release of *Giant Gram 2000* – the engine would almost certainly be perfect for a serious take on the WWE, although whether that would have hardcore wrestling fanatics up in arms, we wouldn't like to imagine…





▼ Japanese? English? Who cares? This is punishment of the highest order in any language.

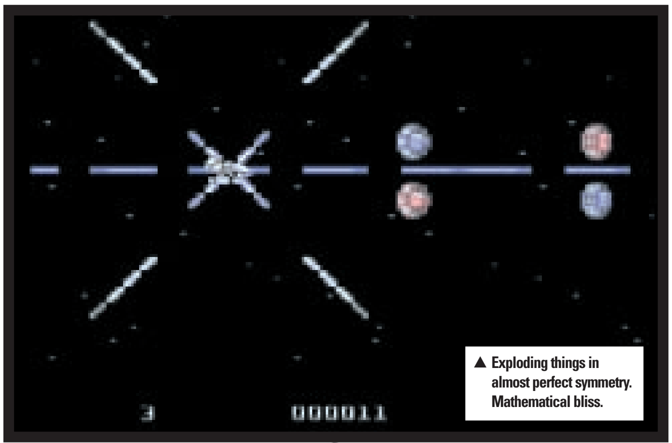
THE GAMES THAT NEVER MADE IT

ARMALYTE 2



Armalyte has always been considered by Commodore 64 owners as one of the greatest shooters the machine has ever seen. So it was perhaps unsurprising that developer Cyberdyne Systems revealed it was planning to release a sequel. According to magazines at the time, *Armalyte 2* was due to be released at the end of 1989 or in early 1990 and was already starting to sound like a must-have.

While the first game boasted plenty of neat touches, Cyberdyne had even grander plans for the sequel – it was looking at adding more enhanced enemies and even a *Fantasy Zone*-style power-up shop. The Armalyte ship was to be suitably re-designed and everything was set to be a lot more colourful (the original game was quite drab in places).



▲ Exploding things in almost perfect symmetry. Mathematical bliss.

Sadly, despite a steady trickle of hype, *Armalyte 2*'s release date came and went and the game never appeared. So what was the reason behind *Armalyte 2*'s demise? While Cyberdyne was happy to work on its follow-up it had to take care of several System 3 games it was contracted to finish. As a result, the completion of titles such as *Last Ninja 3* and *Deadlock* meant that there was no time to continue work on *Armalyte 2* and it was shelved.

Fortunately, however, it does live on – albeit in uncompleted fragments – and can now be found on Frank Gasking's terrific Games That Weren't website. While unfinished, the clips give an exciting indication of Cyberdyne Systems' plans for its sequel, which makes the canning of this potentially great game all the more disappointing.

Thanks to Dan Philips (who also worked on the original *Armalyte*), Gasking's site also hosts a series of previews, which you can find at www.gtw64.co.uk.

WORST LICENCE EVER

Licensed games have a history of being at the shoddy end of the scale, but some manage to out-shoddy even the lamest and most tenuous games…

COUNT DUCKULA 2



Release: 1992
Format: Spectrum, Amstrad
Publisher: Alternative Software Ltd
Developer: In-House

▲ Is there anything about this screenshot that compels you to play *Duckula 2*? Didn't think so…

We expect licensed games to be bad (we're cynical like that) but even we were unprepared for the sheer horror that assaulted us when we played *Count Duckula 2*. In a way it's our own fault; *Count Duckula* was never a great game in the first place, but our love for the excellent cartoon and the vocal stylings of David Jason convinced us that this time all would be well. How wrong we were…

After an incredibly mind-numbing version of the show's theme tune, you were treated to some of the worst visuals of 1992 (although, strangely, the Spectrum version looked miles better than the Amstrad game). While Duckula himself was just about recognisable he suffered from some horrendous animation and controls that would have been better suited to a three-toed sloth, such was their responsiveness. Try to turn him left or right and the garlic-hating duck would take an eternity to respond to your commands (if he reacted at all). Not only did this make it frustratingly hard to dodge enemies, it also made jumping extremely tricky.

Floating and moving platforms were just a few of the many hazards your clumsy duck had to negotiate, and thanks to the cumbersome controls any attempt at jumping usually resulted in death after irritating death. Indeed, it took us over an hour to just bypass the second screen in the game (and it's not because we lack the skills). Critically mauled by gamers and press, *Count Duckula 2* remains an abomination of gaming. Play it at your peril.

THE BASTARD SON OF…

SHINOBI X

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU BOUGHT THE SEQUEL TO A GREAT GAME ONLY TO FIND THAT IT'S RUBBISH? ALTHOUGH MANY FRANCHISES BECAME STALE WITH AGE, EVERY NOW AND THEN A SEQUEL GOT RELEASED THAT TRULY SHOCKED US WITH ITS MEDIOCRITY. THIS MONTH'S ENTRY IN THE SEQUEL HALL OF SHAME IS THE WOEFUL SHINOBI X…

Format: Saturn
Release: 1995 (US)
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-House

Considering the original *Shinobi* has aged so well it's surprising to see how many duff sequels Sega has produced over the past 18 years. We've already covered the dire arcade sequel *Shadow Dancer* (bizarrely eclipsed by a superior Mega Drive remake) but the laughable *Shinobi X* is also worthy of a mention. Like so many 'so bad it's good' games *Shinobi X* compels you to battle on through, even when you know you could be doing more important things with your time – like plucking hairs from your lower back…

The Revenge Of Shinobi, *Shadow Dancer* and *Shinobi III: Return Of The Ninja Master* all proved to be enjoyable experiences on the Mega Drive, and with the arrival of the Saturn fans eagerly looked forward to a *Shinobi* game that would showcase the machine's capabilities (especially as no *Shinobi* title appeared on the Mega CD). Sadly, it wasn't to be, and while *Shinobi X* certainly isn't the worst Saturn game ever made, it falls seriously short of the high standards that so many previous *Shinobi* titles had set.

Unlike earlier *Shinobi* instalments *Shinobi X* was quite plot heavy and told the tale of two warring



▲ This freaky mask guy may be the first boss but he'll still have you gnashing your teeth in frustration.

brothers. Initially trained under the same master, the older boy, Kazuma, craved power and left when his mentor refused to teach him his most devastating techniques. The story starts when younger brother Sho returns home and discovers that a vengeful Kazuma has kidnapped their mentor's daughter and is now holding her hostage in his fortress (you really couldn't make it up…).

This flimsy set-up is an excuse for Sega to unleash some of the most horrendous FMV sequences we've ever seen. It's not the dated footage that's the problem, just the atrociously bad acting. It's so painful it's funny and provides masses of entertainment (although not in the way Sega was intending).

Hilarious FMV sequences weren't the only problems to hamstring *Shinobi X*, as its digital graphics also proved exceptionally poor. While Sho himself was reasonably well animated – apart from his hilarious running – his opponents didn't receive the same lavish attention and wouldn't have looked out of place in Atari's appalling *Pit Fighter*. What infuriated most about *Shinobi X*'s visuals though was that everything was so unbalanced. Some stages looked beautiful and fully captured the mystique of earlier titles (especially *The Revenge Of Shinobi*) while other levels appeared to have been cobbled together from God knows what other failed projects.

The same could be said for many of the enemies; several bosses still hold up under scrutiny today, but creatures like Level 3's dinosaurs (which looked like gangrene-covered phalluses) left a lot to be desired. It's a good job that at least the music was of a high quality, although with Richard Jacques at the helm it was only to be expected.

Of course, *Shinobi X*'s inconsistent visuals wouldn't matter if the gameplay was up to scratch, but Sega managed to drop the ball again by delivering



▲ *Shinobi X*s levels range from the humdrum to the excellent. This one, alas, is not excellent…



▲ "I think you should strangle it quickly before it tries to make friends with us." Well, go on then.

a stilted play experience that lacked the subtleties of other games in the series. Double jumps were fiendishly difficult to pull off, the controls had none of the tightness of previous games, and Sho had an annoying tendency to leap around like a drug-fuelled Zebedee.

Another bugbear was *Shinobi X*'s level design; it was uninspired and lacked the creative flair that had been seen in *Shinobi III*, or even the original arcade game for that matter.

One other notable difference is that *Shinobi X* is much more sword-based than previous games and while it worked to a point it just didn't feel right – and that's *Shinobi X*'s biggest problem: while it's by no means the worst game we've ever played it's certainly not deserving of its rich heritage. While there are many gamers who rate *Shinobi X* pretty highly, as a continuation of the classic *Shinobi* series it remains a very poor effort.

HANDHELD HORROR

While the PlayStation2 has hosted two fairly decent *Shinobi* titles, Game Boy Advance owners haven't been quite so lucky. When Sega first announced that *The Revenge Of Shinobi* would be appearing on Nintendo's handheld, many gamers expected an enhanced update of the Mega Drive hit.

Sadly, we were instead treated to a shambling mess that gave a bad name to both the *Shinobi* franchise and Game Boy Advance titles in general. Poor graphics and lacklustre gameplay turned what could have been an okay conversion into the portable equivalent of *Shinobi X*. Let's hope Sega doesn't make the same mistake in the future.



▲ Are those statues a deliberate homage to the original game or just for decoration? Who knows…

RESIDENT EVIL

IT CAN'T GET ANY WORSE THAN THE LIVING DEAD, RIGHT?

Release: 1996
Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-House

Great RETRO Gaming Moments

***Resident Evil* has so many highlights that it's tricky to pick just one.** But we've managed to pull out the moment when Capcom decided to make staying alive in Raccoon City a full-time job.

On your return from the Guardhouse after a spot of weed eradication, all seems eerily quiet. There's not an animated corpse in sight as you go back to the mansion with your new-found Helmet Key, but as you approach the door something strange happens…

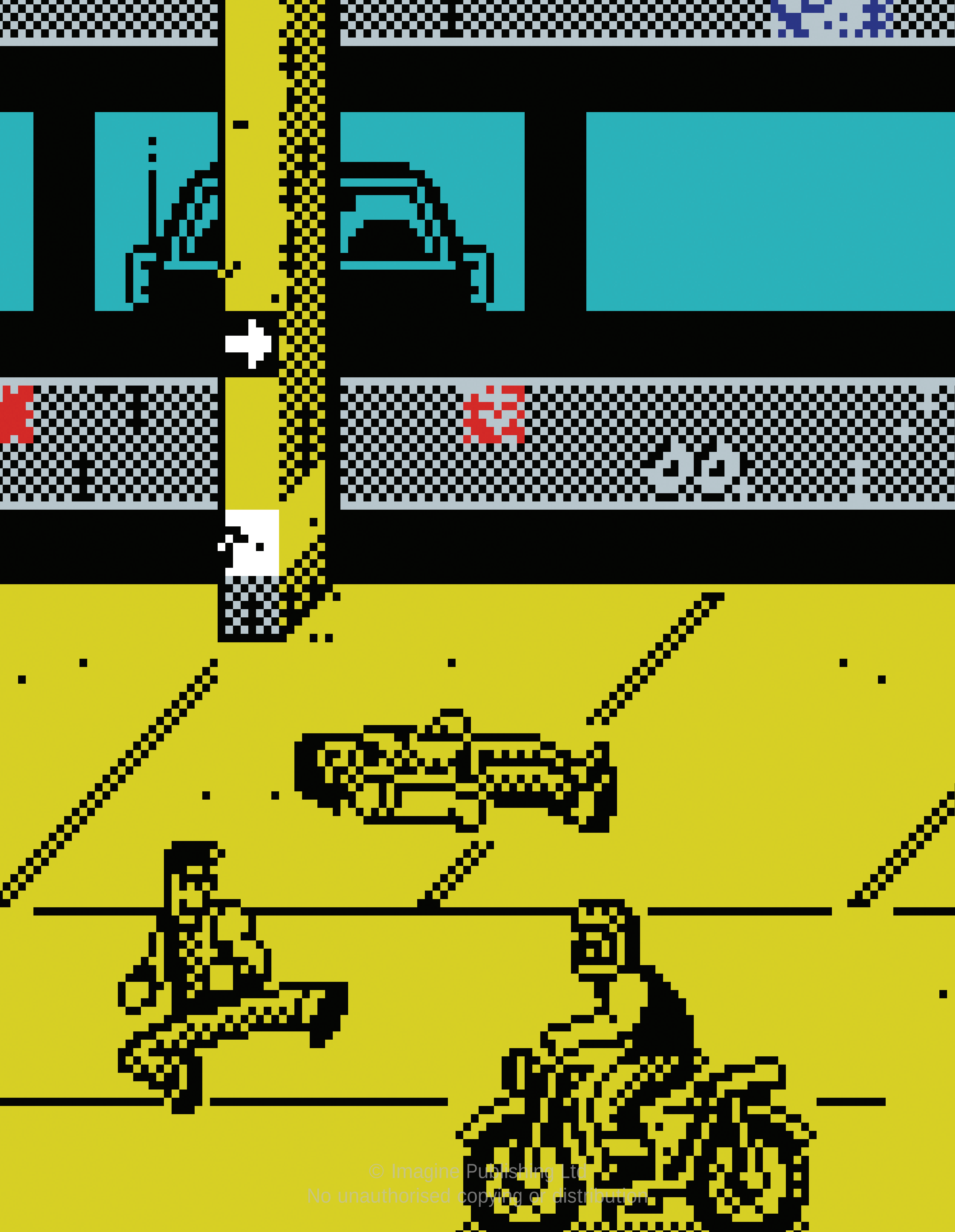
The view cuts to where you were a few moments ago, and with an eerie fish-eyed, first-person viewpoint the camera bounds across the courtyard towards you. But whose eyes are you seeing through? It's too quick to be a zombie and too agile for a Cerberus. You start to panic – what is this thing?

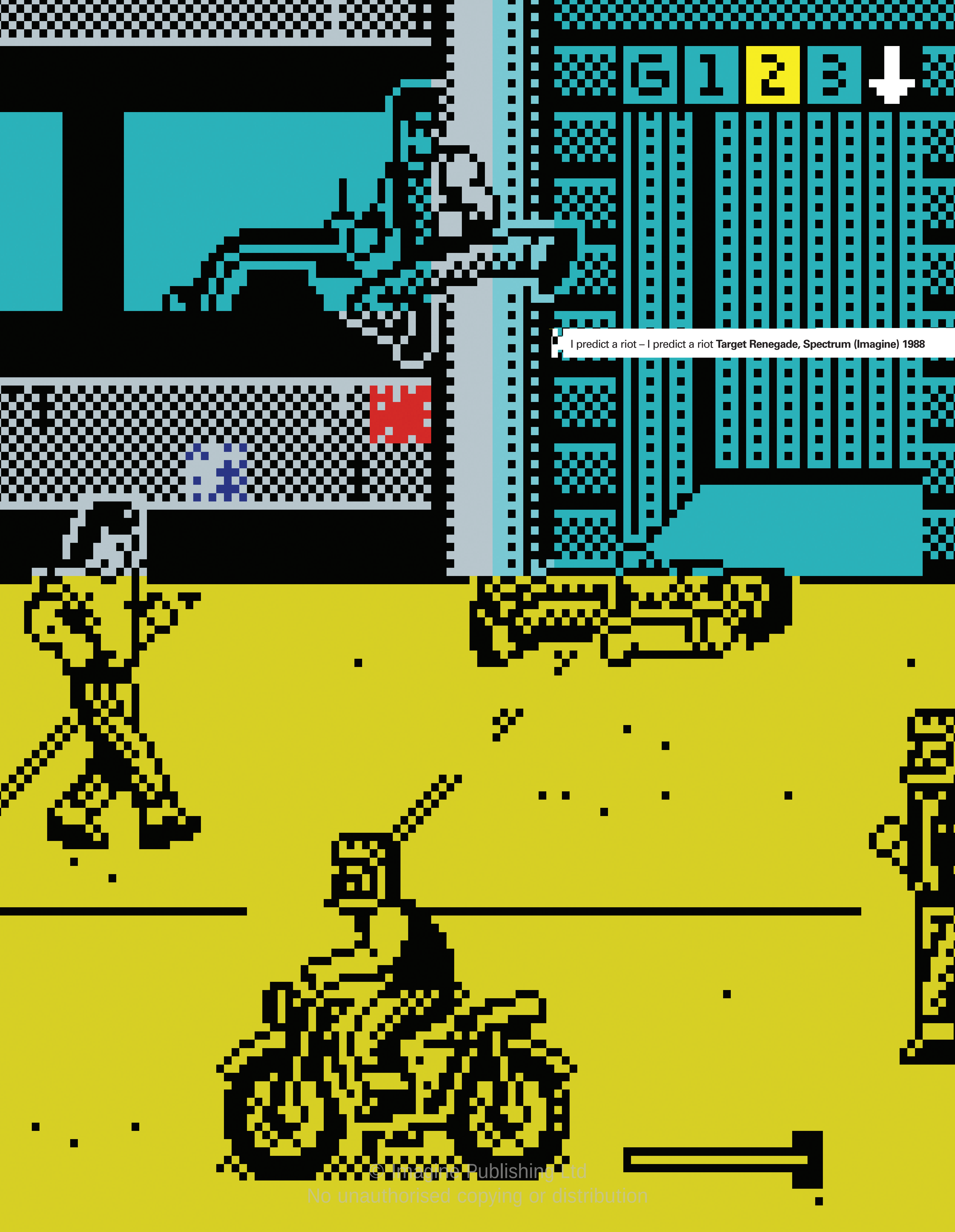
Capcom doesn't beat about the bush in answering your question. As the cut-scene ends the game cuts back to your current position and you're confronted with a hulking green lizard-like creature – the Hunter. It leaps towards you and panic goes critical. You start flinging buckshot around like there's no tomorrow to keep this… thing at bay and eventually it drops with a piercing screech. Relieved, exhausted and fairly proud of yourself, you enter the mansion to continue your exploration without even pausing to rest.

Click. Click. Click. What's that noise? As you cautiously turn the corner another Hunter leaps down the corridor at you from off screen and sticks its massive claws through your pretty little face. Oh. Yeah, someone forgot to mention – those things are everywhere now. You'll never hear that clicking noise without shuddering again…

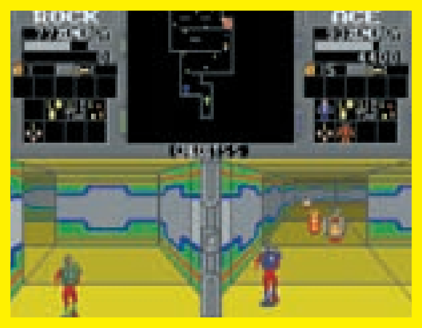


▼ Ha! Got that one. Though not before several of them have demolished your face…

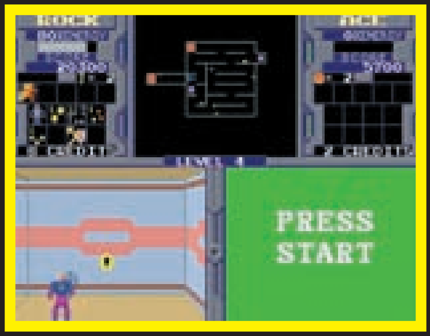




I predict a riot – I predict a riot **Target Renegade, Spectrum (Imagine) 1988**







XYBOTS

BEST REMEMBERED AS THE CREATOR OF ASTEROIDS, CENTIPEDE AND GAUNTLET, ED LOGG HAS PRODUCED ALL MANNER OF UNIQUE GAMES SINCE SUPER BREAKOUT IN 1978. WITH MANY OF HIS CLASSICS EXTREMELY WELL DOCUMENTED, RETRO DECIDED TO TALK TO HIM ABOUT XYBOTS, A RARELY DISCUSSED CLASSIC THAT'S CURRENTLY AVAILABLE ON MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES: EXTENDED PLAY FOR THE PSP

***X**ybots* **was overlooked in arcades due to its complex controls and tricky gameplay, it therefore failed to ignite interest from the gaming community.** But, like a fine wine, *Xybots* has improved with age. After it appeared on Midway's *Arcade Treasures 2,* we still find ourselves running around its complex mazes, blowing the hell out of all and sundry. Add a great portable version courtesy of the PSP (the Lynx outing was also pretty good) and we can now blow up robots and collect coins whenever and wherever we want. Not bad for a game pushing 20 years old – after nearly not getting made in the first place.

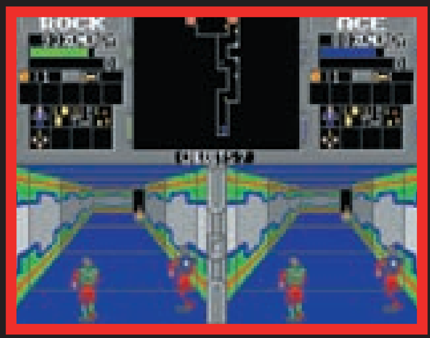
Logg has been synonymous with the arcade scene (even if he did go on to make many console-exclusive titles) ever since he created *Super*



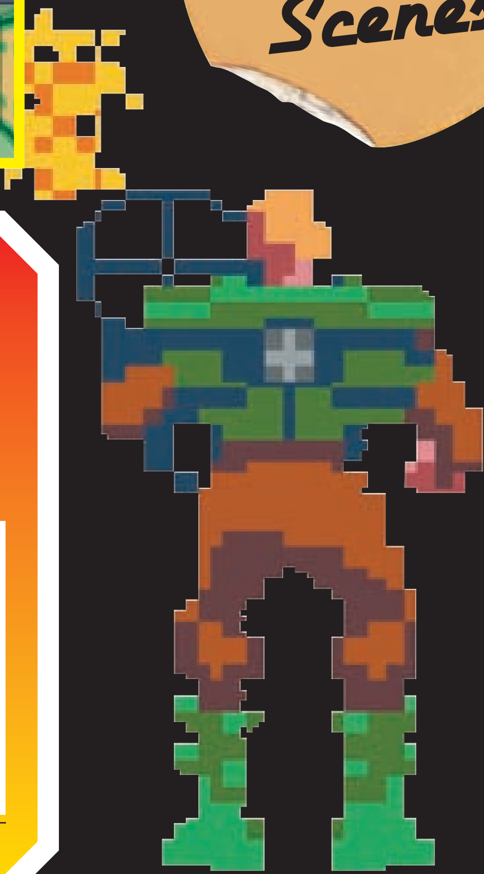
Release: 1987
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Atari Games
Developer: In-House



Behind the Scenes

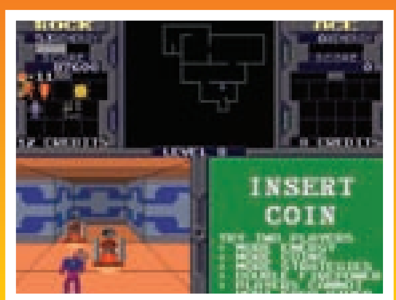




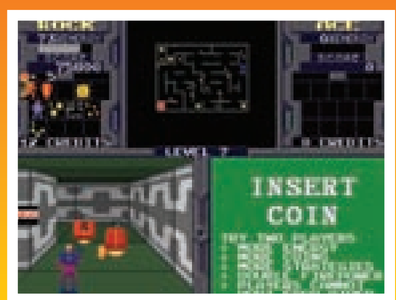


LEARNING THE WAY

Despite the fact that they're not laden with fancy sound effects and state-of-the-art visuals, Logg is convinced that the reason retro games remain so popular is due to the games being so simple yet instantly rewarding. "While it's true that many retro titles are seen as simpler games which appeal to the general public – or 'casual player' as we call them in the game business – they can also be surprisingly deep. Many had multiple layers of strategy and a sense of ease that's rarely seen nowadays. Current titles seem content to deliver astonishing graphics and audio but the games themselves tend to be very overwhelming to the casual player and they have neither the time nor the inclination to spend any time learning the game in question." So there you have it, developers; make it good but keep it simple.



It's amazing that despite being not much more than an intricate maze game, *Xybots* is still hugely enjoyable today.



Not surprisingly then, Midway has included it on its *Arcade Treasures* collection for everyone to enjoy all over again.

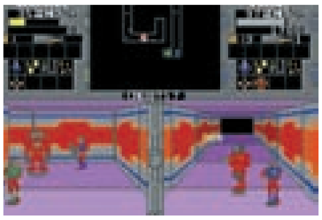
Breakout and the phenomenal *Asteroids* a year later. Mentioned in the same breath as arcade legends such as Eugene Jarvis, Dave Theurer and Yu Suzuki, Logg has been responsible for a vast number of hits across many genres. Like Jarvis, his games immediately send you into 'the zone', making you lose track of what you're doing. Hardly surprising considering the integral part that videogames have played in Logg's life.

"I've always been into videogames," remarks Logg. "From high school, through college and into my first job, I was constantly doing something that involved gaming, whether it was just playing or actually creating them," he recalls. "I'd often get into trouble because of my interest. I remember during my TRW summer job being asked to stop using the company's computers to solve puzzles, while on another occasion I was asked by Control Data Corporation to not use its printers to print pictures. I'd only asked them if they'd fix the head alignment on it… In 1977 I even went so far as to build my own home computer that I used to play games on, so it's safe to say that gaming has had quite a big impact on me over the years."

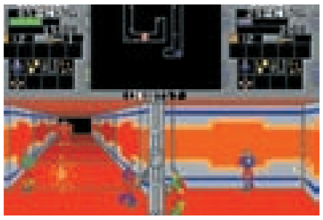
With his keen interest in gaming it was, perhaps, inevitable that Logg would find himself involved with one of the biggest players in the industry, Atari. "A friend had already joined and at the time it was just across the street from Control Data Corporation where I worked," begins Logg. "I had previously had a chance to play on a prototype of either the VCS or Atari's 2600 (I can't remember now, it was a long time ago) at a Christmas party around 1976/1977 and thought it was a fantastic little toy. As a result, I felt it was time for a change of scenery and sent in an application. I passed the interview and the rest, as they say, is history."

Although Logg's first project *Dirt Bike* (which he finished for another programmer) never went into production, his first game to be released became an instant hit. That game was *Super Breakout*. The mega smash *Asteroids* quickly followed and Logg became a darling of the industry. The early years of videogames were highly experimental with the release of many exciting titles. Some – like *Space Invaders, Pac-Man* and *Galaxian* – became overnight successes while others simply fell by the wayside. Still, it was this experimentation that gave birth to classics such as *Defender, Robotron* and *Dragon's Lair* with many cabinets built specifically for just the one game. *Xybots* was a classic example featuring a swivel top joystick that could be twisted to enable your on-screen character to rotate through 360 degrees. The end result was an impressive-looking blaster that forced you to negotiate mazes that got larger and more convoluted the deeper you progressed while blasting away at an array of opponents. It's a quirky title inspired by two, very different titles.

"THE EARLY YEARS OF GAMING WERE VERY EXPERIMENTAL AND GAVE BIRTH TO CLASSICS SUCH AS DEFENDER AND DRAGON'S LAIR"



ATARI ST



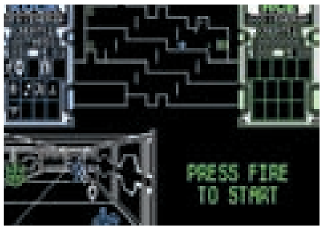
AMIGA

THE GOOD AND THE BAD

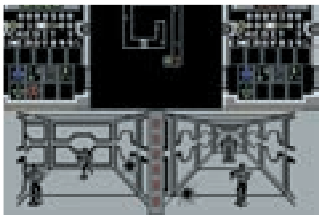
Like many arcade games, *Xybots* was quickly ported to every 8 and 16-bit system available but suffered a rough transition mainly due to its complex control system.

While the Amiga and Atari ST versions were at least able to reasonably emulate the original look of the game – thanks to their superior visuals – the 8-bit versions fared less well, with the Amstrad and Commodore 64 outings looking particularly bad. Sadly, all five versions were hamstrung by their controls and, as a result, *Xybots* received middling scores in various publications.

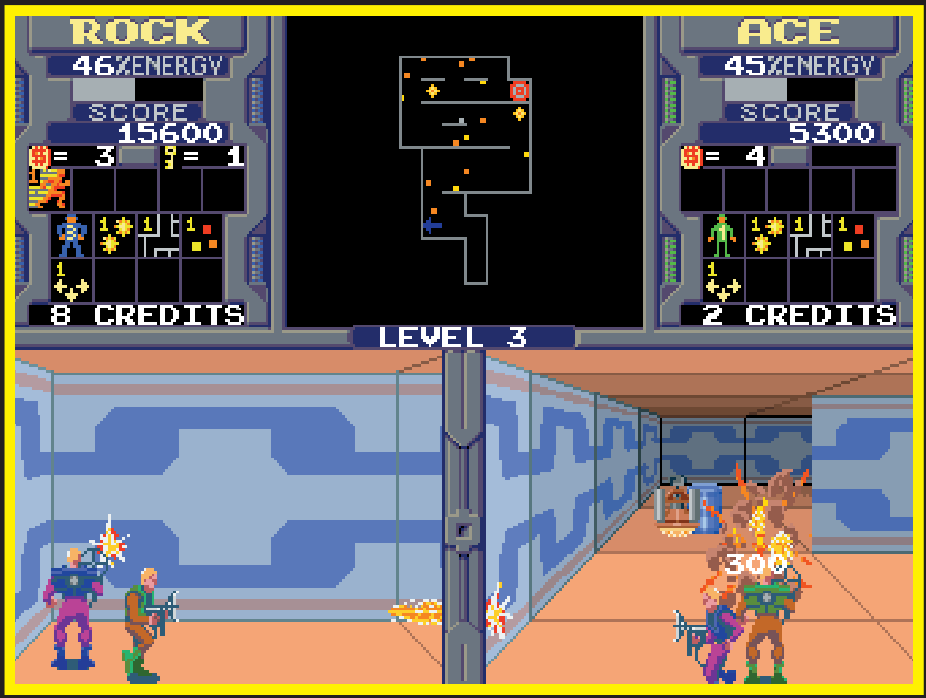
Later versions such as the Atari Lynx fared much better – although the controls were still far from perfect – but it wasn't until the later consoles appeared that everything that made *Xybots* fun to play was successfully emulated.



AMSTRAD



C64



Playing with a friend made the game far more frantic, although it also meant you'd argue over distribution of power-ups and money found along the way.

Id's *Doom* and Logg's own *Gauntlet*.

YOU GOT ISSUES

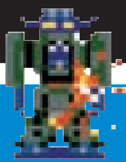
"Doug Synder, an ingenious engineer/technician at Atari, and myself were talking about how we could create *Doom* on our existing hardware," recalls Logg. "Sadly, we had no bitmap hardware so we couldn't employ the same technique as *Doom*. Fortunately, I had an idea that I could create something similar if I was able to limit the number of angles that the player could view. I created the maze-like tiles by hand, using 8x8 pixels to prove it was possible, and that was essentially how the game graphics got started. So, in essence, *Xybots* started off life as a challenge to replicate an FPS without the use of any bitmap or 3D hardware. Once we'd decided how *Xybots* would look, the actual graphical style was very easy to implement. We had motion objects for the Xybots' many enemies and shots, and the playfield stamps were all that I needed for the actual backgrounds."

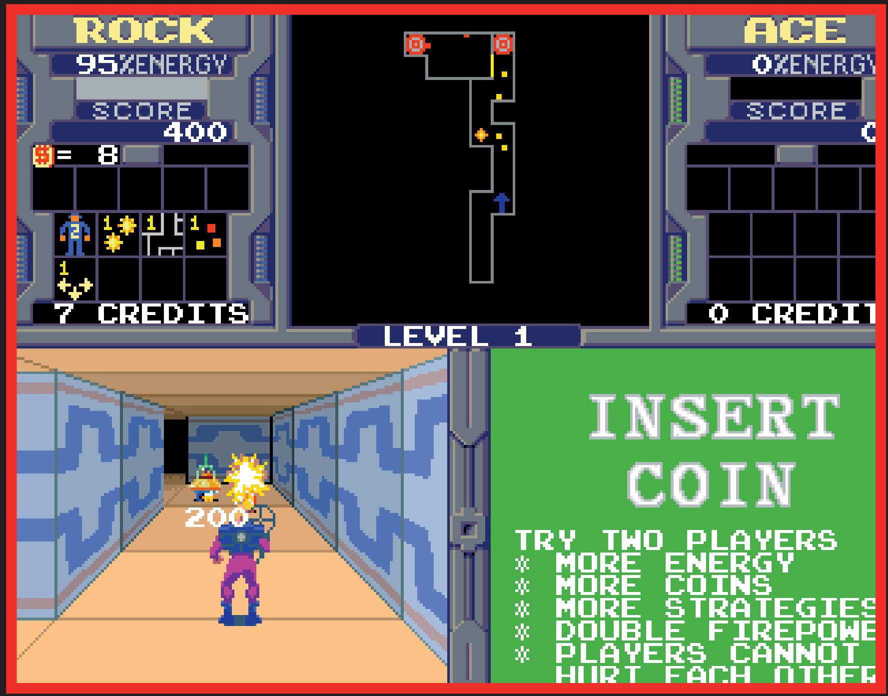
Despite having few problems with *Xybots*' unique style, production was far from smooth, with Atari often questioning whether a release was actually feasible. "I had three main issues with *Xybots*, so the development process was quite rocky at times," confirms Logg. "The first hurdle we encountered was building a controller that would do what the game needed. Luckily, this was just a technical problem that our mechanical design department was eventually able to solve."

"A much larger issue was getting the public to use and accept the new controller in the first place," he continues. "This was a very difficult problem and, to be honest, I don't think we ever successfully solved it. I also believe it was *Xybots*' very control system that resulted in its lower earnings and reduced sales." Indeed, the public seemed to find the control system so complex that, at one stage, Logg wasn't even sure if the game would go into production, despite the fact that it was already up and running. The biggest dilemma for Atari was explaining to the public that the character's viewpoint could actually change. "There are always problems with new controls from a design standpoint but, as I pointed out, the real problem was getting the general public to accept them in the first place," continues Logg, clearly warming to the subject. "It became increasingly clear in our field tests that many people didn't know that the controller rotation would actually change their viewpoint. And no matter how we tried, not everyone got it and it became *Xybots*' main weak point. Nowadays, the general public is a lot more sophisticated and it's quite possible that *Xybots* would have been a success – back in 1987, though, it just wasn't to be…"

"The third issue was political and to this day I still have regrets that I didn't do anything about it," continues Logg. "Before we decided on *Xybots*, the original game was called *Gauntlet III: Catacombs* and featured all of *Gauntlet's* original characters.

"DESPITE USING A NEW DIMENSION, XYBOTS RETAINS THE ENEMY-FILLED MAZES AND THE TEAMING UP ELEMENT THAT MADE THE GAUNTLET GAMES SO POPULAR"





The simple control method made getting the hang of *Xybots* incredibly easy… but making it through alive was another matter entirely.



Sparing the time to track down extra dollars meant you could reap the benefits in the shop, but it meant risking running out of energy.



Frustratingly, marketing didn't want any more *Gauntlet* games and insisted we change the theme of the game. Yes, you heard right! Bob Flanagan, my co-programmer on the project, and I changed it to a *Major Havoc* theme. I still believe we should have kept the *Gauntlet* name and theme."

FOND MEMORIES

When you consider Logg's revelation, having *Xybots* as the spiritual successor to Atari's famous slash-'em-up actually makes sense. Despite using a new dimension, *Xybots* retains the enemy-filled mazes that made *Gauntlet* so popular, loads them with loot and keys, and sees you descending deep into enemy territory. As with *Gauntlet*, the game worked just as well if you were playing on your own or with a friend. Teaming up gave you the advantage and allowed you to move deeper into the game, but there was still a healthy degree of competition and you'd often break away from the hectic action to grab yourself a few extra coins.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the two games – aside from the perspective, of course – is that *Xybots* is missing two extra players. A fact that may help to explain why Atari was so reluctant to re-use the *Gauntlet* moniker. "Despite trying, there was no way we could get four players up and running, mainly because of the game's perspective," admits Logg. "As *Xybots* was unable to offer the same sort of co-operation that had been possible on both *Gauntlet* titles, it was, perhaps, inevitable that its earnings could never compete." Indeed, *Xybots*' lack of earnings was the main reason Logg was never commissioned to create a sequel. A travesty, as *Xybots* was ahead of its time and offered a unique experience that similar games of the era were unable to match.

Those who did click with Logg's creation however, found a title with depth and secrets galore, although Logg himself was unable to tell us any. "God, it's been so long," he groans when questioned about any possible hints he could give us. "I'm not sure if I can give any specific secrets other than to say that *Xybots* was a title that required the player to learn specific techniques and master the ability to shoot and dodge." A shame, as we've already discovered a few tricks ourselves – like the ability to shoot around corners without allowing your opponents to fire back. Interestingly, Logg can't remember if this was a design he'd implemented or if it was discovered by resourceful gamers. "*Xybots* was a long time ago now, and I can't recall that at all," he admits. "I do remember that there were plenty of techniques for moving forward, turning and generally retreating – you'll have to discover all the other secrets for yourself."

Secrets aside, one thing Logg is convinced of is that *Xybots* would no longer work if released today – even if it was sufficiently updated. "To be honest, FPSs in particular have left this game far behind," he says. " It's not just a case of competing on a graphical front, the current generation of online titles has now taken multiplayer gaming to a whole new level." Despite his views, Logg's pleased that *Xybots* is still being enjoyed by so many gamers – even if he never managed to play any of the actual home conversions, "I had nothing to do with any of them," he confirms. Never mind, Ed, maybe we'll send you a copy of *Midway Arcade Treasures 2*…



GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT

WE ATTEMPT TO REWRITE THE HISTORY BOOKS BY SALUTING THOSE CLASSIC GAMES THAT HAVE FALLEN BY THE WAYSIDE

EXTERMINATOR

LET'S HAVE A BIG HAND FOR THIS ARCADE ODDITY

You'd think that a game that saw you control a disembodied hand would be seared into the mind forever, but it's surprising how many blank stares you'll receive upon mentioning Gottlieb's ambitious coin-op *Exterminator*.

Created by a company known primarily for its pinball machines, *Exterminator* marked a number of firsts for both Gottlieb and the industry when it was released in limited numbers in 1989. For starters, it was the first arcade title that Gottlieb had worked on for seven years; it also marked a new era for the company after it was bought by Premier.

Housed in a unique cabinet, *Exterminator* was certainly an unusual looking game and an extremely rare one to boot – it's thought that only around 250 machines ever made it into arcades.

Perhaps the main aspect of the game that set it apart from other titles was that it was the first arcade game to ever use digitised graphics. Before the likes of *Pit-Fighter* and *Mortal Kombat* allowed you to square off against 'lifelike' opponents, *Exterminator* was letting you lay down all sorts of hurt on a variety of annoying animals.

Taking on the role of a pest controller, your task was to clear a row of houses of their troublesome vermin. Controlling one of the Exterminator's hands (which would eerily float about the screen) you could use it to crush, pound and generally kill anything that came near you. When things got too hectic it was possible to move to the left hand side of the screen and employ your laser finger (yes, really) to fry more pesky opponents. Care was needed, though, as you only had a limited amount of juice with which to fry your foes, although this could be increased by collecting power-ups and destroying certain items.

Once a critter had been defeated it would drop to the ground and turn a small section of the tiled floor red; when you had created a vertical line the room would then be cleared and you could move onto the next area in the house.

While *Exterminator* looked impressive it became monotonous after continued play. The controls also caused problems and having to move over to the far side of the screen every time you wanted to shoot something quickly became tiresome. Luckily, another version was released that let you shoot from anywhere on the screen, but this made the game too easy and added nothing to the original gameplay.

While it never set arcades alight *Exterminator* did create a decent impression when it was released for home computers in 1991. The Amiga version looked particularly good and perfectly captured the bizarre atmosphere of its arcade parent; unsurprisingly, the 8-bit versions didn't fare quite so well on the visual front, but still proved to be competent conversions.

While the unique look and feel of the original arcade machine wasn't perfectly ported, the Amiga version at least managed to contain the excellent two-player version of the game. Players could team up or fight against each other and this mode's addition added a much-needed layer of depth to *Exterminator*'s rather dull and uninspiring gameplay.

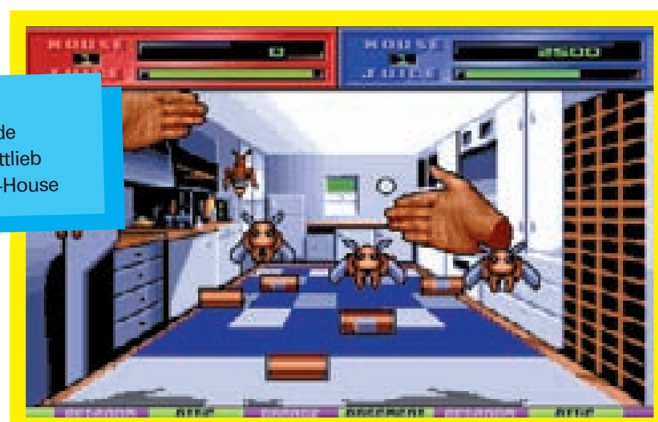
Thanks to the obscurity of the original arcade game and its general bizarreness, *Exterminator* is rarely mentioned nowadays. While it's by no means a classic game, it's an oddity that's certainly worth a few hours of your time.



▼ Add your own voice-over to create that *Life Of Grime* vibe.

Release: 1989
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Gottlieb
Developer: In-House

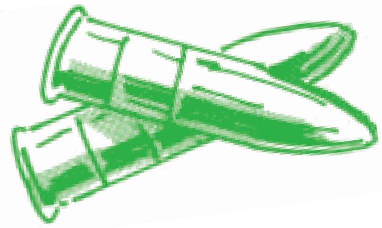
▼ Look at those relentlessly sinister flies. Make no mistake – those are the cold, dead eyes of a killer.





EXTERMINATOR (Arcade) Gottlieb, 1989 – US arcade flyer

KEEP ON RUNNING (AND GUNNING)



GRAB A MACHINE GUN, TIE YOUR BANDANA AND PREPARE TO GO BALLISTIC

Ah, the run-and-gun genre. There's something about playing a soldier/alien /whatever and running around with enough weaponry to take out a small country that really appeals to our inner child. Maybe it's because we're a generation raised on the macho images of Stallone and Schwarzenegger (not to mention the Van Dammes and Seagals), or we might just be suckers for pretty pyrotechnics.

Whatever the reasoning behind it, there's little doubt that few games can get the blood pumping like a good old-fashioned run-and-gun romp. Titles like *Green Beret*, *Ikari Warriors*, *Berzerk* and even *Gauntlet* can all be linked to the genre, and while the perspectives or objectives may change, the core gameplay always remains the same – it's just you (though occasionally with a few friends) against seemingly unlimited numbers of bad guys.

If you're still not sure what makes a run-and-gun title, a quick glimpse at the game's cover is normally enough to set you on the right track. Pick up a title like *Arnie*, *Mercs*, *Gryzor* or *Midnight Resistance* and you'll be staring at several beefcakes with enough testosterone to be a danger to public health. The majority of them will also be sporting hideously bad perms. Topping off the ensemble will be a huge weapon (maybe the artist had an inferiority complex) that appears capable of destroying the planet, not just the jungle where the game's set.

These games may seem simple by today's standards, but the importance of the genre cannot be denied. Like shoot-'em-ups they were massively popular in the mid-Eighties and Nineties and are still being made today (albeit only sporadically).

Join us as we take a look back at the trendsetters of the genre, or those that were simply great fun to play. With so many classic games available we'd never be able to list every great title, but the following 15 examples are the perfect place to start.



Retro Feature

METAL SLUG

Year: 1996
Format: Arcade/Neo Geo AES
Developer: SNK
Why not try: *Contra, CT Special Forces, Alien Hominid*

For many, the *Metal Slug* series remains the pinnacle of run-and-gun gaming. Wonderfully detailed 2D visuals, stunning animation and frenetic, old-school shooting are just a few of the joys to be found in what many gamers consider to be one of the greatest arcade franchises ever.

Despite its World War II setting, the *Metal Slug* series has always been laced with plenty of humour; its cartoony style, over-the-top animation and inventive level design created a unique atmosphere that still has yet to be topped.

Starting off with a bog-standard gun (as well as a full complement of bombs) you could rescue POWs who gave you access to brand new weaponry. Heavy machine guns, flamethrowers and rocket launchers were just a few of the items at your disposal and it was possible to cause ridiculous amounts of devastation.

This formidable weaponry was needed, though, as *Metal Slug* was an incredibly tough game that required real mastery if you were to make any progress. As in all good titles, however, mistakes were always your own fault and could never be blamed on poor level design or unfairness on the game's part. It will always have a special place in our hearts.

CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS

Year: 1992
Format: SNES
Developer: Konami
Why not try: *Contra, Super Contra, Contra Hard Corps, Contra Shattered Soldier*

Although *Contra* and *Super Contra* were both superb examples of the genre, it's *Contra III: The Alien Wars* that remains the crowning achievement of the series. A reasonably early release for Nintendo's 16-bit console, *Contra III* upped the ante tremendously by adding massive bosses, superb visuals and a rocking soundtrack to the core gameplay.

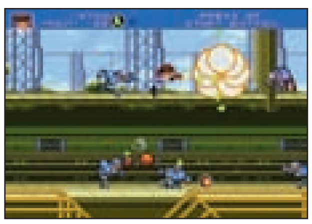
Huge, screen-filling smart bombs, inventive bosses (you'll never forget the plasma-spewing turtle or robotic skeleton) and challenging (but never unfair) gameplay combined to create one of the most visceral experiences around. While side-scrolling levels awash with beautiful parallax scrolling featured most heavily, special mention must also go to the fantastic overhead Mode 7 stages.

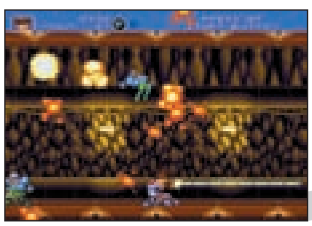
Although other *Contra* titles have since appeared on various formats (including the Mega Drive's excellent *Contra: Hard Corps*) few, if any, were able to capture the magic of the SNES outing. Granted, *Contra: Shattered Soldier* was a step in the right direction (although we would have preferred a true 2D game), but this seems to have been undone by the recent *Neo Contra*. If you're looking for the best in the series, then stick with the SNES or Mega Drive titles.



GUNSTAR HEROES

Year: 1993
Format: Mega Drive
Developer: Treasure
Why not try: *Gunners Heaven, Rooster*





Treasure's debut on the Mega Drive was absolutely spectacular and remains an incredible achievement for the 16-bit console. When *Gunstar Heroes* first appeared, Mega Drive owners' jaws dropped when they witnessed what their trusty machines were achieving. Huge amounts of sprites were thrown about the screen with gay abandon, there were rotation and scaling effects on display that would make a SNES blush, and the whole package was tied together by fantastic gameplay.

Variety always helps to keep a game interesting and it was something *Gunstar Heroes* had in abundance. One minute you'd be hurtling along in a souped-up mine cart, the next you'd be facing off against a massive grinning face.

Considering *Gunstar Heroes'* similarities to the *Contra* series (albeit with a much more cartoony look) it should come as no surprise to learn that many of Treasure's developers had worked on the classic Konami series. What was a surprise, though, was the amount of ingenuity and excitement that *Gunstar Heroes* contained. Even small touches like being given a choice of weapon, or choosing between shooting on the run or firing while standing still all added to its charms and it remains one of the best 16-bit examples of the genre.

MIDNIGHT RESISTANCE

The most noticeable aspect of Data East's *Midnight Resistance* was its incredibly slick control system. Rather than implementing a standard joystick and buttons configuration, Data East included a dial that allowed you to fire in eight directions. Not only did this give *Midnight Resistance* a unique feel, it also added an exciting new level of strategy that was often sorely missing from other games in the genre.

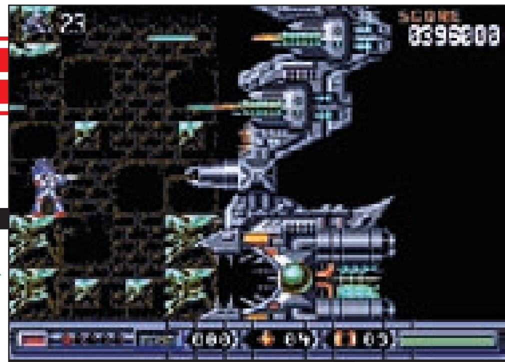
Of course, the new gameplay mechanic was there for a reason and while the first stage was fairly easy to negotiate, the difficulty level quickly escalated due to the amount of enemies you had to deal with. Luckily, with a little effort the control system was easily mastered and soon became second nature.

Another interesting feature were the keys. Dropped by enemies in each stage, keys enabled you to access some serious weaponry at the end of each level. Three-way shot, flamethrowers and shotguns were all available if you had enough keys and added an interesting slant to how you tackled each stage.



Year: 1989
Format: Arcade
Developer: Data East
Why not try: *Turrican, Turrican 2*

TURRICAN 2



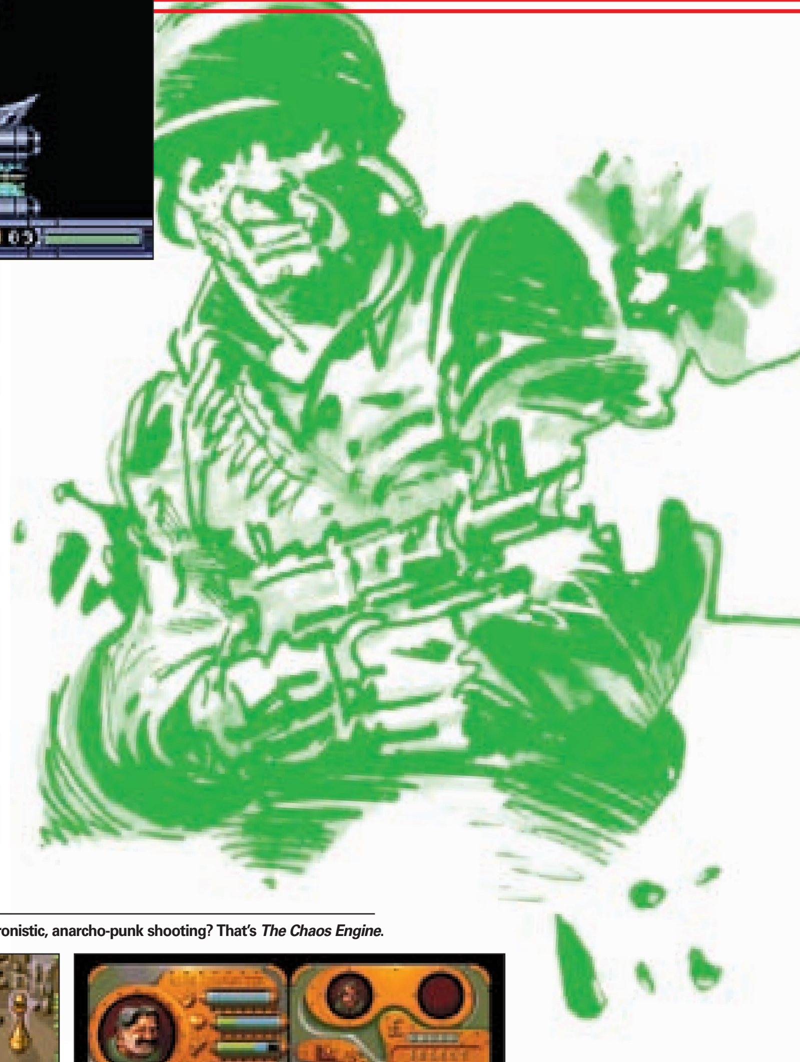
Year: 1990
Format: Amiga
Developer: Factor 5
Why not try: *Turrican, Turrican 3, Midnight Resistance*

Although the original *Turrican* blew us away (especially the astonishing Commodore 64 version) we have to admit to preferring the fantastic sequel. While the C64 outings were incredibly accomplished and made great use of the machine's capabilities, it was the superb looking Amiga version that truly hooked us. Here was a game that finally looked and played like it actually belonged in an arcade and not on your TV screen.

Keen to improve on the amazing original, *Turrican 2* featured even bigger levels (there were now 1,500 enemy-filled screens to battle through) and even managed to add some excellent scrolling shoot-'em-up levels into the mix.

True to form, there was never a dull moment in the original *Turrican* and this was amplified a hundredfold in its ambitious sequel. Enemies came at you thick and fast, the bosses were masterworks of design, and the entire game had an incredibly slick, polished feel to it that was missing from so many other 16-bit titles.

While it might not have been as innovative as the original game, there had been so much care poured into *Turrican 2* that it was impossible not to love it. Many Amiga owners insist that this is one of the greatest games that was released on the machine. We're not too sure about that, but it's a very close call.



THE CHAOS ENGINE

▼ Anachronistic, anarcho-punk shooting? That's *The Chaos Engine*.





Year: 1993
Format: Amiga
Developer: The Bitmap Brothers
Why not try: *Chaos Engine 2, Alien Breed, Gauntlet*

Back in the 16-bit days of old, the Bitmap Brothers could seemingly do no wrong. Whether they were re-inventing the sports genre with the likes of *Speedball* or creating amazing shoot-'em-ups such as *Xenon 2,* almost all their games was acclaimed by critics and public alike. *The Chaos Engine* took familiar Bitmap themes (metallic visuals and a dark, futuristic look) and added a blend of strategic thinking and frenzied blasting that made the game stand out.

Set in a steam-punk Victorian England, this was strictly a two-player affair. Fortunately, if a friend wasn't available to help out the computer would control the second player. Each character had their own abilities and it was possible to level them up at the end of each stage. The levels themselves were vast mazes that required you to activate a certain number of nodes before you could open the exit. A certain amount of grey matter was required to solve each stage and this gave *The Chaos Engine* a unique style unmatched by most titles in the genre.

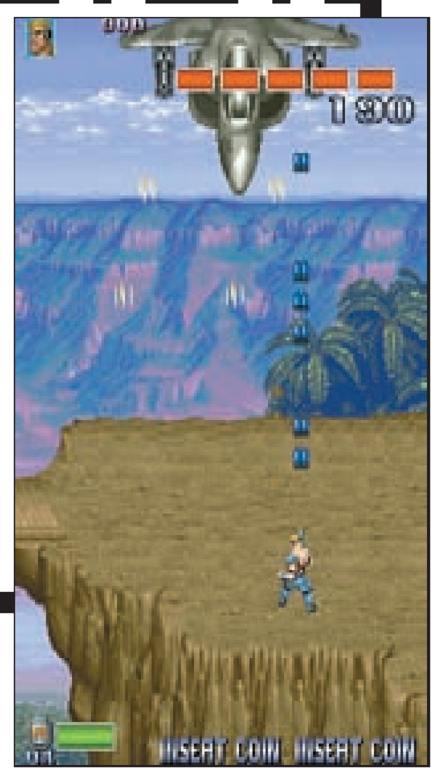
MERCS

Year: 1990
Format: Arcade
Developer: Capcom
Why not try: *Commando, Shock Troopers, Ikari Warriors*

We're a sucker for tough shooters and *Mercs* is one of the trickiest. Capcom took the groundwork that had been laid down in the likes of *Ikari Warriors* and its own *Commando* and created a frenetic blaster that ate 10 pences like they were going out of fashion.

Dropped off by helicopter, your task was to rescue the President of the United States and return him to the White House. The action kicked off immediately and before you reached the bullet-spewing jet at the end of the first stage you'd have dispatched around 40 soldiers, dodged what seemed like a hundred bullets and no doubt died a few times as well. Even though *Mercs* supplied you with a handy energy bar, the hectic on-screen action meant that only the most skilled of players would get through the first few stages with little or no damage.

As you progressed through the game your muscle-clad warrior was able to drive around in boats, Jeeps and tanks and could even use handily situated gun emplacements. Packed with a great selection of weapons (you've got to love the flamethrower), some challenging levels and solid gameplay, *Mercs* is the perfect game after a hard day in the office.



NARC

Year: 1988
Format: Arcade
Developer: Williams
Why not try: *Crime City, E-SWAT*

If you thought the life of an American cop was all about eating doughnuts and filling out mountains of paperwork, *NARC* could well have changed your mind.

Shockingly violent, *NARC* was a gore-fest that saw you playing a futuristic cop trying to make an important big bust. The streets were filled with all manner of scum and villainy, and while you'd score points for busting the no-good perps it was much more satisfying to simply blow them away in a shower of blood and guts. Famously sporting the 'Winners Don't Use Drugs' logo, *NARC* encouraged you to stay on the right side of the law by offering you huge amounts of points for any packets of white substances that you picked up.

Enemies came at you thick and fast and it was all you could do to keep them at bay with your machine gun and rocket launcher. In many ways *NARC* reminds us of the excellent *Robotron 2084* (both are by Eugene Jarvis) due to its tense gameplay and precise controls. Recently re-released on Midway's *Arcade Treasures 2*, *NARC* remains a fantastic and bloody blaster.





ALIENS

Year: 1990
Format: Arcade
Developer: Konami
Why not try: *Contra, Alien Hominid*

Forget the creepy atmosphere that had been so abundant in the 8-bit computer classics, as Konami's vision of the *Aliens* world was a non-stop blastathon that didn't let up for a second. Admittedly, it had stretched artistic licence somewhat with the various new aliens it had created (although the traditional HR Geiger creations were all present and correct in all their hideous glory) but you were having too much fun to care.

Taking control of either Ripley or Hicks your goal was simple: rescue Newt and destroy as many Xenomorphs as possible. True to form, Konami gave you a huge arsenal to play with and you were soon blasting away with rocket launchers, flamethrowers and three-way missiles.

The highlights of the game, however, were the fantastic into-the-screen sections that saw you tearing through the abandoned complex in an armoured truck. Aliens sped towards you at a ridiculous rate and it was all you could do to keep a clear head and pick 'em off before they reached you. The bold, bright colours may have been a stark contrast to the gloom-laden film, but as far as action went, *Aliens* matched its cinematic namesake perfectly.

SUNSET RIDERS

Year: 1991
Format: Arcade
Developer: Konami
Why not try: *Wild Hearts, Blood Bros*

It would be criminal not to feature this beauty. Bold, bright colours, fantastic level design and a great sense of humour are all hallmarks of this Konami classic. Set in the Wild West, *Sunset Riders* gave you a choice of four characters and saw you collecting bounties on wanted men.

What makes it worthy of inclusion here, though, is its cool setting, inventive boss characters and varied gameplay. One minute you'd be running along the backs of stampeding cattle, the next would see you tearing across the screen on horseback while dodging bullets. It was this continually changing gameplay that



made *Sunset Riders* so much fun, a fact that was further enhanced when you considered all the comic touches Konami had included – get caught in an explosion and all that you could see through the inferno were your character's shocked eyes. *Sunset Riders* is a superb game that, like *Metal Slug*, mixes humour and action to great effect.



VARIATIONS ON A THEME

Although many think the run-and-gun genre just consists of side-scrolling shoot-'em-ups, it can be interpreted in many different ways. Some gamers will swear blind that *Metal Slug* and *Turrican* are simply platformers with shooting sections in them, while others will bandy about names like *Rastan* and *Bionic Commandos*. However, it just comes down to the individual's interpretation of each game (essentially, even something like *Doom* can be considered).

Granted, no-one's ever going to mistake the likes of *OutRun* or *Chase HQ* for anything other than driving games, but run-and-gun games are different due to the many different elements that they often contain. On these two pages, we'll be taking a look at some of the obvious (and more tenuous) choices that for whatever reason didn't make the previous cut.

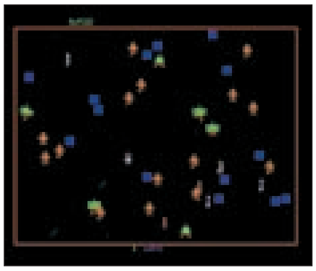
ROBOTRON 2084

Year: 1982
Format: Arcade
Developer: Williams
Why not try: *Smash TV, Total Carnage*

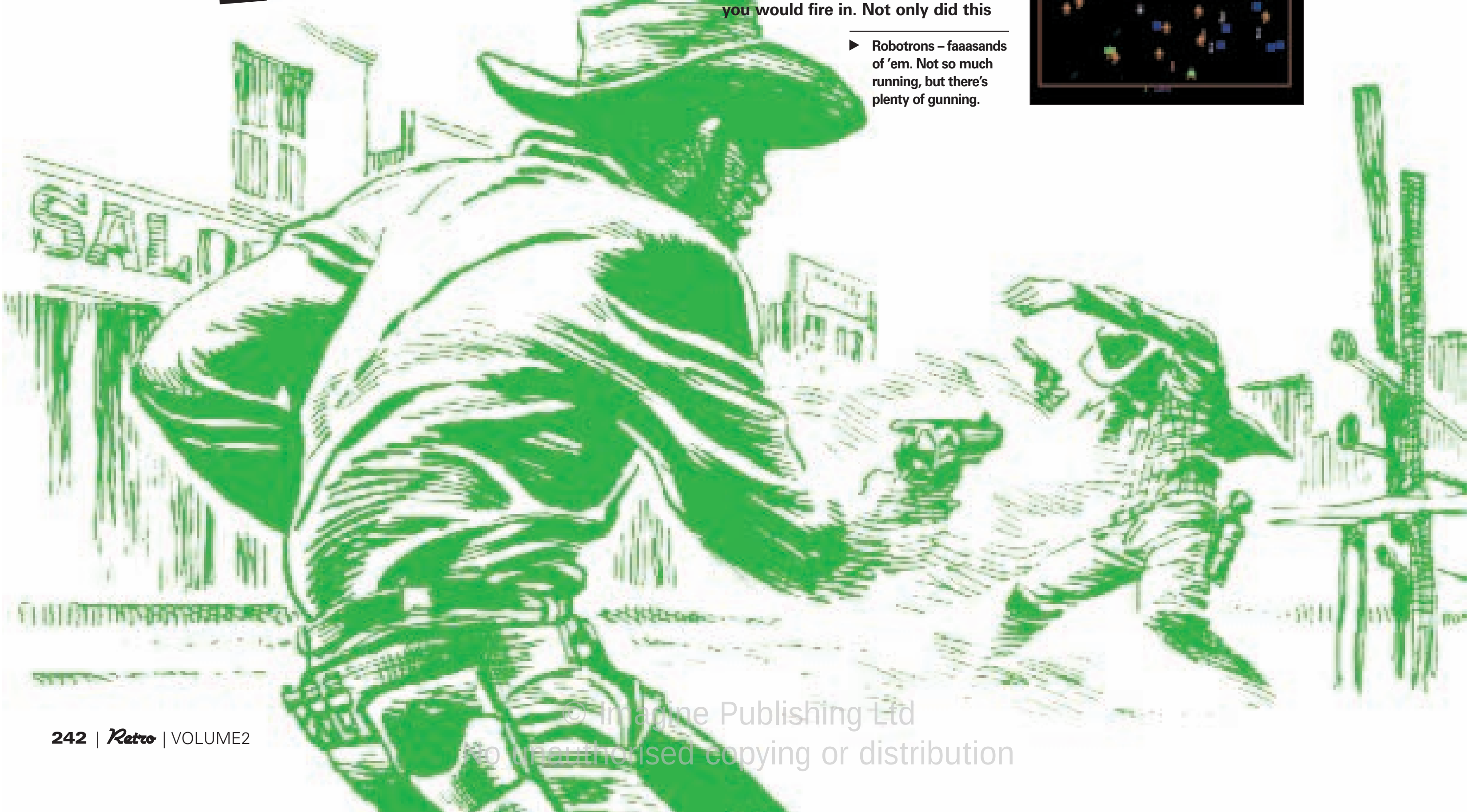
In many successful games the greatest amount of fun often comes from the simplest of premises. In *Robotron 2084* you're placed slap bang in the middle of a horde of vicious Robotrons with just two goals: survive until the next stage and rescue as many Earthlings as you can.

With all the action taking place on a single screen and with increasing amounts of enemies to destroy, *Robotron*'s control system was unique and a joy to use, as you had access to two joysticks – one controlled your movement while the other dictated what direction you would fire in. Not only did this create an utterly new experience, it also allowed skilful players to get as much out of the cramped playing conditions as possible.

While the first few stages were fairly easy – many of the opposing Robotrons simply attacked en-masse – the later levels were nail-bitingly tough and scared off all but the most dedicated players. *Smash TV* and *Total Carnage* are just a few of the games that are indebted to *Robotron 2084*, but in our minds, as good as they are, you're better off sticking with the original classic.



▶ Robotrons – faaasands of 'em. Not so much running, but there's plenty of gunning.



CABAL

Year: 1988
Format: Arcade
Developer: TAD Corporation
Why not try: *Nam 1975, Blood Bros, Wild Hearts*

Okay, so all the action took place on a single, non-scrolling screen, but *Cabal* still featured all the classic ingredients that make run-and-gun titles so much fun. There was a decent range of weaponry to choose from, plenty of enemies to dispose of and massive end-of-level bosses. Everything was present and correct, but like the fantastic *Robotron 2084*, it had simply been confined to a smaller playing area.

Using a trackball (although there was another version that used a traditional joystick), *Cabal* required you to hide behind a wall and clear the screen of enemy opponents; once they were all defeated, you could move on to the next, harder stage. While you could run left and right to avoid enemy fire, you could only return fire when standing still. Even though you had a fair amount of cover to hide behind at the beginning of each stage, your enemy's continuing firepower would soon reduce your surroundings to rubble. Luckily, you were able to return the favour and practically everything on-screen could be reduced to ruins with just a few grenades.

Cabal's trackball made shooting really accurate (certainly more so than the sluggish cursor that accompanied the joystick version) and while the action got a tad repetitive, it remains a solid blaster.





▲ Do you like to blow stuff up? Then *Cabal* could be just what you're looking for.

SHINOBI



Year: 1987
Format: Arcade
Developer: Sega
Why not try: *Shadow Dancer, Rolling Thunder 2, Elevator Action Returns*

Shinobi is quite a difficult game to pigeonhole. While certain levels required a fair amount of platform finesse in order to continue, the vast majority simply saw you progressing from A to B and dispatching as many bad guys as possible.

Armed with an unlimited supply of shurikens (and no doubt magic pockets to keep them in), your task as Joe Musashi was to rescue a bunch of kidnapped kids and return them to the Iga clan. While it was possible to make it through stages without using any weapons (and you'd receive a hefty bonus for the effort) the real fun involved killing as many foes as possible. Burly, sword-throwing guards, knife-wielding frogmen and hard-to-avoid gunmen were just a few of the bad guys your mighty ninja faced, but all could be disposed of with a few well-placed throwing stars and some handy ninja magic.

Add to this a constant stream of enemies and the action that rarely lets up for a second – even the bonus rounds that saw you shooting ninjas for an extra life weren't a cakewalk. With memorable bosses like the fire-throwing Ken-Oh or the huge Samurai Red Lobster, *Shinobi*'s inclusion in this list becomes more acceptable.

BIOMECHANICAL TOY

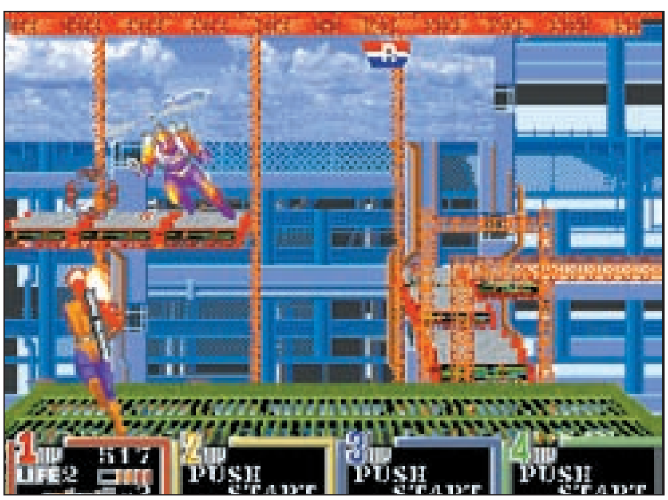
Year: 1995
Format: Arcade
Developer: Zeus
Why not try : *Gunstar Heroes, Rooster*

Like *Shinobi*, *Biomechanical Toy* is a title that straddles genres, but it's so much fun to play that we just had to include it. A platformer at heart – hell, you can even jump on the heads of enemies – *Biomechanical Toy* still has more then enough frantic blasting in it to justify its inclusion here.

While the weapon upgrades weren't as extravagant as in other games in the genre, the bosses were terrific and perfectly fitted the run-and-gun mould. Boxing glove-wearing chess pieces, demonic faces and even computer viruses were just a few of the inventive foes you faced throughout your journey and each one was as wild and wacky as the stages they populated.

Biomechanical's graphic design was a bizarre cross between *Alice In Wonderland* and *Micro Machines*, and once you'd experienced its surreal landscapes they remained with you forever. As you progressed through each stage, there were countless items to collect, which revealed the game's platforming roots. But Zeus combined the two genres so well and created such an enjoyable romp that to leave it out of our list would be inexcusable. Track it down to see what all the fuss is about.





GI JOE

Who would have thought a coin-op based on a toy would have got a mention? Don't be put off by the cringe-worthy association, though, as *GI Joe* is an excellent little shooter and a worthy addition to the genre. And don't worry about the dire plot (something that seems to plague most arcade games) – just concentrate on all the hectic action and try not to lose your Joe in all the surrounding carnage.

The best way to describe *GI Joe* is as an into-the-screen *Cabal*. Each level scrolled towards you and you had to take out as many enemies as possible.

Year: 1992
Format: Arcade
Developer: Konami
Why not try : *Mercs, Commando, Ikari Warriors*

Tanks, planes, oil drums and bullets were just a few of the objects you had to avoid and that was before you even considered the countless soldiers that swarmed through each level. Fortunately, up to four players could play together and storm through the stages, so if you had a bunch of mates with you things got a lot easier.

In a world of polygon-based games, *GI Joe* now looks rather poor, but even the briefest of plays will reveal its gaming goodness.

CLASH OF THE TITANS

B•O•M•B J•A•C•K

As gaming infiltrated the home market a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre, machine or even developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all that opposed him. First recorded in playgrounds in the early Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine, or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month it's the 8-bit computer conversions of the excellent *Bomb Jack*.

ROUND 1: VISUALS

COMMODORE 64: The C64 version of *Bomb Jack* easily captures the exuberant spirit of the arcade original. The sprites are nice and chunky, there's a selection of well-drawn backgrounds and everything remains faithful to the original iteration. Overall, a great success.

SPECTRUM: Even though it features some rather sinister looking sprites, we're still very impressed with this Spectrum conversion. The monochrome sprites lack the striking impact of their arcade counterparts, but the backgrounds are of a high quality and the sprites easily stand out against them.

AMSTRAD: It's the first round and the Amstrad already finds itself trailing behind its 8-bit brothers. While it features some colourful sprites, it lacks the detail of the Spectrum game and can't hope to match the larger-than-life character sprites of the Commodore 64 version. The backgrounds are also rather poor meaning that the Amstrad immediately drops down to third place. Not a good start for Alan Sugar's machine.

WINNER: COMMODORE 64
RUNNER UP: SPECTRUM

ROUND 2: AUDIO

COMMODORE 64: While the C64 wins this round by default (it's the only version to have any music) it was still a tough decision to make. Despite featuring tunes on the title screen and during the game, neither really tests the C64's sound chip. Luckily, some boisterous spot effects manage to make up for the annoying music.

SPECTRUM: We weren't really expecting too much from the Spectrum – so we weren't disappointed. There's no music of any description and the spot effects consist of little more than white noise. Amazingly, though, they still sound better than the crummy Amstrad effort meaning that the Sinclair once again bags second place.

AMSTRAD: Good God, what's going on here? Not only is there no music of any sort, the spot effects used throughout sound atrocious. Quite why the Amstrad coders couldn't manage even decent sound effects is anyone's guess, but the CPC now finds itself heading for the wooden spoon.

WINNER: COMMODORE 64
RUNNER UP: SPECTRUM

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

COMMODORE 64: It may impress aesthetically, but *Bomb Jack* on the C64 is a pig to play – this is mainly due to the oversized sprites that have been used. Jack certainly looks nice, but his sheer size makes it stupidly hard for him to avoid enemies; as a result, it's practically impossible to pull off intricate moves and the game loses serious respect.

SPECTRUM: In a word – perfect; in two – bloody brilliant. Thanks to some extremely tight controls, Jack is an absolute doddle to control and the reasonable size of all the sprites means he can squeeze into all sorts of tight situations. There's the odd bit of duff collision detection every now and then but this is still a masterful effort.

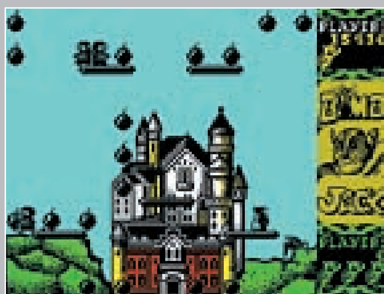
AMSTRAD: While it's not as good as the Spectrum outing, it still runs circles around the pathetic C64 effort. It's easy enough to avoid the many enemies, but we did seem to notice a few more collision problems. The Amstrad slightly redeems itself, but it still manages to slump into third place overall.

WINNER: SPECTRUM
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

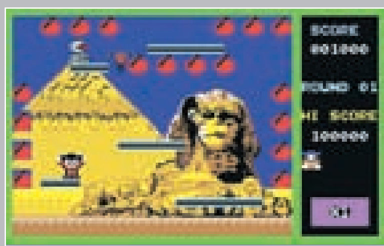
AND THE WINNER IS…

SPECTRUM

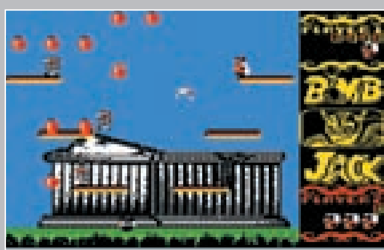
"Fix!" we hear you cry. While it's true that the C64 did win two of the three rounds, there's no excusing its abominable gameplay. While not exactly the underdog, the Spectrum proves that it's possible to combine decent aesthetics with superb gameplay to nab that all-important win.



Three cheers for the Spectrum (above) and its superior game.



Not-quite-dire gameplay can't save the Amstrad version (below).





BOMB JACK (Various Home Systems) Elite, 1986 – Crash Magazine promotion

Greatest RETRO Game Ever

CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS

MODE 7, MASSIVE BOSSES AND EXTREMELY MACHO MEN – IT'S A GUN-TOTING DREAM COME TRUE

Format: SNES
Release: 1992
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house

Every now and then a game manages to get nearly everything right. *Contra III* is one such game. First appearing in British arcades in 1987, the original *Contra* (or *Gryzor*, as we knew it) was a rather enjoyable run-and-gun title that switched between traditional side-scrolling levels and some nifty 'into the screen' sections. A sequel appeared in 1988 and despite some solid conversions and spin-offs, everything went rather quiet.

When the series was eventually revitalised to appear on the SNES, Konami used every trick in the book to ensure that the third instalment of its *Contra* series would be a game to remember.

The likes of *Legend Of The Mystical Ninja* and *Super Castlevania IV* had already proved that Konami was perfectly in synch with the SNES's impressive graphical capabilities and *Contra III* pushed the boat out even further. Not just content with delivering wonderfully detailed sprites and glorious backgrounds (check out Level 3's fantastic industrial backdrop) Konami also added plenty of Mode 7 trickery, which greatly enhanced the already fantastic gameplay.

Reprising the roles of Lance and Bill you found yourself in familiar gun-toting territory as you made your way through the first war-torn level. Cars exploded, wild dogs tried to sneak up on you and snipers fired at you from high platforms, while you tried to stay calm through the whole chaotic mess.



▲ Playing *Contra III* is like taking part in a bad Eighties action film. Excellent.

Power-ups fell from the sky at certain points and gave you access to cluster bombs, lasers and other cool weaponry; it was even possible to carry two weapons and switch between them when needed – something that was appreciated, as *Contra III* was a tough customer.

Enemies and bullets flew at you thick and fast, keeping your adrenaline pumping and heartbeat racing, and they never let up for a second, even when you had access to screen-destroying smart bombs. It might have been a fight to secure every inch of screen, but *Contra III*'s clever difficulty curve never cheated you and always left you hungry for more… and there was plenty to see in Konami's amazing game.

Once the huge plasma-spewing turtle at the end of the first level had been defeated, it was time to enjoy one of two jaw-dropping Mode 7 levels. Viewed from above, you could use the shoulder buttons to rotate the screen and had to destroy a set amount of enemy emplacements before coming face to face with yet another astounding Mode 7 boss. Indeed, the many impressive bosses were easily some of *Contra III*'s highlights and showed off both the system's capabilities and Konami's ingenuity. Few gamers would forget Level 3's huge skeleton that ripped its way through a cargo door, but every single boss and mini boss left its mark on you in some way.

Not content with delivering fantastic boss battles, Konami had also paid close attention to each stage's level design and the amount of variety packed into the game was immense. One minute you were running through an abandoned city, the next you were tearing across an alien-infested highway (complete with obligatory sci-fi music) on a souped-up jet bike. If variety is the spice of life, *Contra III* was a vindaloo.

It wasn't just the superb design

UPDATE, SCHMUPDATE

We'll admit we were incredibly excited when we first heard that *Contra III* would be appearing on the Game Boy Advance. The lack of buttons was a bit of a worry, but we were more than confident that Konami would be able to achieve a fantastic port. How wrong we were…

The music was vastly inferior to the superb anthems that played in the original SNES version and it was no longer possible to switch between weapons or use the handy smart bomb. It was also incredibly hard to dodge bullets on the GBA's small screen.

Perhaps the biggest omission, though, was taking away the two Mode 7 stages and replacing them with two levels from the Mega Drive outing. While the replacement levels were fine, it would have been nice to have the original version of the game.





▲ If there's another game where you fly around on a missile, we haven't seen it.



▲ This is just of the many inventive mini-bosses you'll bump into during the game.

that made the levels so unforgettable either; each was filled with memorable events. Who could forget the amazing Mode 7 bomber that flew onto the screen on the first level and turned a peaceful city into a raging inferno? Or what about that part in stage four where you were clinging on to the underside of a missile and had to jump to numerous others as they sped through the sky?

We're not going to say that this is the greatest Konami title that's ever been made, but it's certainly a defining moment in the *Contra* series (a franchise that Konami admits borrowed heavily from the various *Alien* films).

Sure, the Mega Drive title *Contra: Hard Corps* may have been technically more accomplished (especially when you consider the hardware it was running on) and there's no denying that *Contra: Shattered Soldier* on the PlayStation2 looks very nice, but for us *Contra III* remains the daddy. So if you're feeling bored on a Sunday afternoon, or fancy a change from the latest 3D collect-'em-up, why not dig out *Contra III*? You'll be bloody glad you did.

ROBOTS ARE RUBBISH

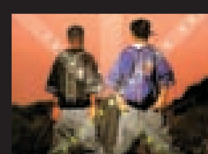
No doubt unhappy at the thought of British schoolkids controlling butch army men, Konami and Nintendo removed them from the Japanese game before it arrived in the UK, replacing them with lame robots. Not only that, it changed the title to *Super Probotector: Alien Rebels*.

Although UK NES gamers would have found nothing unusual with these poncey looking robots, the metal heroes spoilt the game's atmosphere and didn't look anywhere near as hard as the original sprites. Oh well...

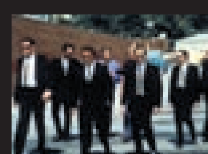
▼ A flying bike, some top sci-fi music and a bloody great gun that causes huge explosions. Sounds like the perfect night in to us. And the perfect night out, come to think of it...



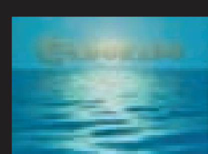
OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1992



FASHION VICTIM:
Thanks to Kriss Kross, wearing your trousers halfway down your arse was extremely popular in 1992. If only those young tykes were still around now we'd give them wickedy wack.



AT THE MOVIES:
Quentin Tarantino burst onto the movie scene with the blistering *Reservoir Dogs* and re-invented the heist movie at the same time. Not bad for a self-confessed video-store geek...



ON THE BOX:
Want to know true horror? Then sit through *Eldorado* the next time it's on a cable channel. Wooden acting and naff storylines saw this over-hyped soap axed after just one year.

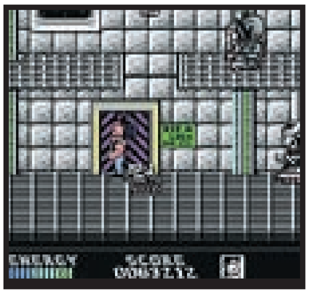


ON THE RADIO:
Fans of REM were treated to perhaps the group's greatest album to date, as proved by such classics as *Drive, Night Swimming* and *Try Not To Breathe*. Stipe and co. have lost it now, mind.



DEAR SANTA:
With the Gladiators proving so popular on ITV, it was perhaps inevitable that they'd get their own line of toy dolls. God knows who bought them, but there must have been a demand...

THE BASTARD SON OF...



RENEGADE III: THE FINAL CHAPTER

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU BOUGHT THE SEQUEL TO A GREAT GAME ONLY TO FIND THAT IT'S RUBBISH? ALTHOUGH MANY FRANCHISES BECAME STALE WITH AGE, EVERY NOW AND THEN A SEQUEL GOT RELEASED THAT TRULY SHOCKED US WITH ITS MEDIOCRITY. WE'RE GOING TO LOOK AT SOME OF THE WORST FOLLOW-UPS EVER, STARTING WITH IMAGINE'S RENEGADE III: THE FINAL CHAPTER...

Release: 1989
Format: Various Home Systems
Publisher: Imagine
Developer: In-House

T*arget Renegade* is widely regarded as one of the greatest beat-'em-ups available for the 8-bit computers. Its unique blend of cartoon visuals and graphic violence (not to mention a superb two-player mode) made it an essential purchase.

Imagine our shock and horror, then, when we eventually got hold of *Renegade III: The Final Chapter* and found it to be one of the worst games we've ever played. Suspension of disbelief is always necessary in videogames, but the thought of your hardened renegade having to make his way through different time zones was asking just a little too much, even for us.

Starting off in a prehistoric zone, complete with club-wielding cavemen and pugilistic dinosaurs, you later found yourself travelling through even more outlandish stages in an attempt to rescue your kidnapped girlfriend. The Egyptian stage featured mummies of various shapes and sizes, Medieval Zone had vicious dragons and hobbyhorse-mounted knights, while the final future level saw you battling your way through a variety of robots and some deadly flying saucers. Variety may well be the spice of life, but while the levels themselves featured plenty of detail, defeating their inhabitants was another matter entirely…

Renegade III had some of the worst collision detection we've ever seen. Hitting and avoiding enemies became an extremely frustrating prospect and you soon learnt that it was better to simply avoid foes rather than actually face them – not the ideal solution for a flick-screen beat-'em-up by any means. Get to certain stages of each level, though, and a dust-up was inevitable, as you needed to finish off several waves of enemies before you could proceed. Stodgy controls, a limited selection of moves and that godawful collision detection all combined to create some of the most soul-destroying moments we've ever encountered, and that was before you even took into account the ridiculously strict time limit that the game imposed.

Six minutes might sound like



▲ So this is the Egyptian Zone, is it? Well, that's just lovely. Can we go now, please?



▲ Beating up T-Rexes was always going to be easy because of their puny little arms. No contest.



ample time to finish a stage, but the mass fights you had to wade through meant that many gamers never even made it off the first stage, let alone the final level. Indeed, even the briefest mention of *Renegade III* is enough to cause various members of the team to turn into stuttering empty husks of their former selves.

Perhaps the biggest oversight of *Renegade III*, though, was the lack of a two-player mode. After wowing gamers with *Target Renegade*'s dual-player action, *Renegade III* felt like a massive step backwards and left a rather nasty taste in the mouth. A second fighter would have been perfect to help out with those frantic battles you had to face on each level, so it's a mystery why Imagine decided to drop it.

To be fair, the Spectrum version was a lot more playable than its Amstrad and C64 counterparts (it featured none of the control problems of its 8-bit peers) but it was still a disappointment when compared to *Target Renegade*. Chances are, though, if you were an Amstrad or C64 owner, you'd have been extremely gutted with your purchase and could still be suffering today. We know we are…

NEVER SAW IT COMING

By far the biggest problem in *Renegade III* was its collision detection. Many of the levels had large pits (normally filled with spikes or lava) that needed to be crossed. While it was possible to avoid some by climbing to a higher platform, other times you were left with little choice but to try to clear them. There was nothing worse than sailing across a gap with what looked like half an inch to spare, only to see your tough brawler fall to his knees and die on the other side.



▲ The astonishingly accurate re-creation of medieval life really takes your breath away, doesn't it?

Haven't We Met Before?

Rampage and Ramparts

COULD THIS BE THE LAZIEST RIP-OFF EVER?

Imitation may well be the sincerest form of flattery, but we're pretty sure that Activision was more than a little annoyed when rival developer Go! released *Ramparts* in 1988.

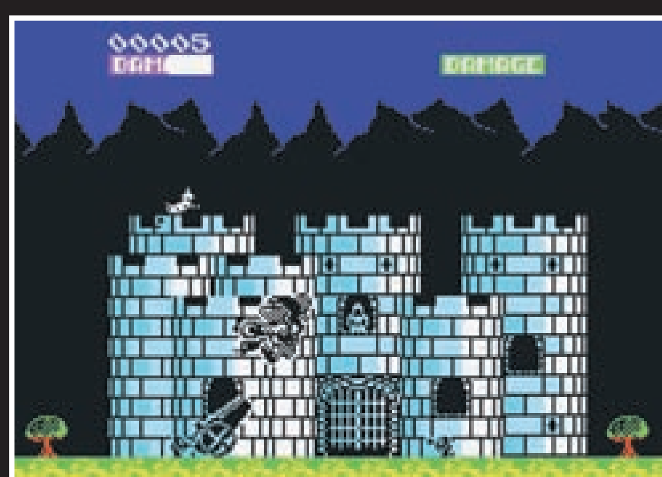


Rampage had proved popular in arcades when Bally Midway released it in 1986 and Activision was quick to snap up the potentially lucrative licence. No sooner had *Rampage* arrived on home computers, Go!'s *Ramparts* was quickly jostling for attention and the similarities between the games were unmistakeable.

Whereas *Rampage* saw you control giant B-movie monsters, *Ramparts* placed you in the metallic body of a giant knight. In *Rampage* you had to make your way through each city and destroy as many buildings as possible, while avoiding the city's guards who would attack you with tanks and helicopters. *Ramparts*, on the other hand, saw you, er, destroying large castles and avoiding siege cannons and other ancient weaponry. Even the loading screens were extremely similar and if a similar situation had happened today, you can guarantee Go! would have been sued quicker than you could say 'infringement'

Fortunately for Activision, *Rampage*'s superior visuals and gameplay and a three-player mode revealed *Ramparts* to be nothing more than a quick cash-in.

▼ It's like *Rampage*, but in a medieval setting and therefore completely different, yes? Er, no.





Platinum Productions may no longer be around, but in the Eighties it was responsible for some of the Spectrum's greatest conversions. We caught up with the company's co-founder, David Anderson, to find out how four schoolboys took the gaming world by storm

DAVID ANDERSON

interviewed by DARRAN JONES

Most 14-year-olds would be happy with a paper round to earn a bit of cash. Or perhaps a bit of dog walking or car washing. Not David Anderson. When he was just out of short trousers he got together with some friends and started his own development house creating top-quality Spectrum conversions. At 14 they were publishing their own titles, by 17 they were industry veterans…

Born in Edinburgh in 1967, Anderson's formative gaming experiences were with the likes of *Phoenix* in his local arcade. But when home computers came along, his interest shifted and his savings went on a ZX81. "Our school already had a ZX80 but we all waited for the ZX81 to come out and bought one of those instead. We soon started to type in basic programs and experiment with what was possible on the machine." The 'we' in question were Anderson and fellow computer fans Ian Morrison, Alan Laird and Bobby Dickie.

The four teenagers soon became bored with the games they were buying through classified ads ("people sent you the listing and you simply typed it in," Anderson explains), so they decided to take matters into their own hands. "We started to run our own line ads in the back of magazines and would send people photocopied listings and instructions for gameplay," says Anderson. "We quickly realised that Basic was useless and that we had to learn Assembly language; this all happened within a four-month period. By spring 1982 we were developing Assembly language games and other graphics demos for the ZX81. My arithmetic tells me that we were 14 when we started publishing our own titles."

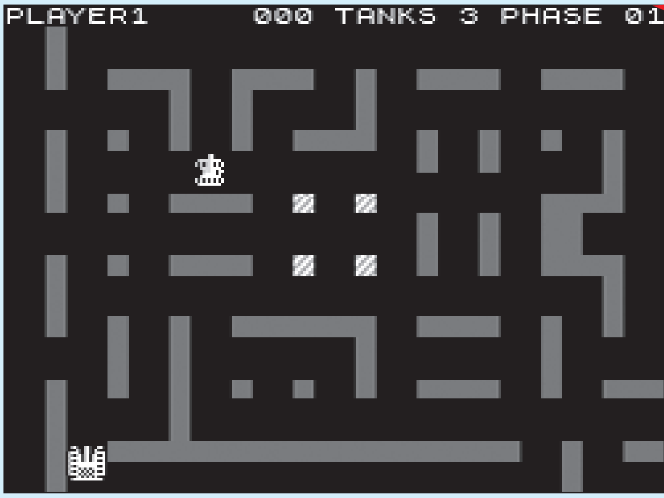
Pooling their resources, the friends shared their knowledge and essentially taught themselves. Armed with their new skills and a couple of their own games, they decided to break into the industry; something they found a lot easier than they had expected. "We got into the industry at the very beginning," says Anderson. "It was easy to buy line ads in magazines and it was easy to go to the local resource centre and photocopy the relevant materials. The rest was simply cashing cheques and stuffing envelopes."

It wasn't enough, though, and after their early taste of success, Anderson knew that the four friends would have to create a more professional image in order to entice the bigger publishers. "Platinum Productions was a vehicle to get us in the door at Ocean Software in 1984," he explains. "We wanted to adopt a name that would get us attention, so we created the Platinum brand because it communicated 'expensive' and 'valuable'. I called Jon Woods [managing director] at Ocean and left a message asking that he call back David Anderson from Platinum Productions. He called back to say, 'Who the heck are Platinum Productions?' Two weeks later we had a deal to code *Beach Head* for the launch of the US Gold label later that year at the PCW exhibition in London."

It sounds like the very definition of an overnight success, and Anderson realises that his big break was a painless experience. "Thinking back, it ought to have been very hard for us to break into the industry," he admits. "Jon Woods once told me that it took two sets of skills to be successful – a set required to get in to his office and a set to stay there. There were many people with the skill set to stay there – the technical skill set – but few with the entrepreneurial skill set to get in the door in the first place."

YOUNG GUNS

The videogame industry has been criticised in the past for abusing programmers' skills and cheating companies out of royalties, but despite their relatively young ages, Anderson and friends were never troubled by such inconveniences. Setting themselves up with a big law firm in Glasgow, Anderson is sure that Platinum Productions always had the best representation possible (even if they didn't always negotiate the best deals). Not only that, but entering the industry at



such a young age wasn't unheard of.

"We made good money – much better than many others in the business at that time," he recalls. "Everyone was young, it wasn't just us – even the publishing houses were owned by people in the 19- to 22-year-old bracket. Ocean was an exception, though, as the founders weren't actually games people. Their previous business had been renting props to film production companies; they were pure entrepreneurs – we were games guys. If you were 16 or 17 you started a development house. If you were 19 or older and had some family money then you started a publishing house. Recently people remember the internet bubble and young kids starting firms like Napster; in the early Eighties, games was a similar boom but there was less money in it as the market was much smaller."

With Platinum Productions having a publishing deal, it quickly set to work on a series of conversions for the Spectrum that set the young team apart from its peers. Its conversions of the *Beach Head* games were of a particularly high standard and Platinum Productions soon found itself being handed some very big licences, most notably *Zaxxon*, *Tapper* and *Rambo*.

Although pleased with the chance to work on such high-profile titles, Anderson was perfectly aware that the Spectrum wouldn't always be up to the task at hand. "If ever there was a poisoned chalice it was *Zaxxon*," Anderson remembers. "It was prestigious to be asked to do it, but very hard to do on the Spectrum with the technology we had at the time. Still, I really liked the animation work we did on the explosions and it represented the beginnings of our 00 technique of mapping behaviour and data structures together as objects."

Tapper also presented challenges thanks to the vast amount of sprites involved and its fast-paced, constant multi-channel music. "On the Spectrum constant music was a

8-BIT GLORY

Despite the introduction of the 16-bit generation of computers, Platinum Productions continued to work on conversions for the Spectrum and other 8-bit machines, mainly due to Ocean not wanting the schoolboy programmers to move away from the still lucrative market. "We were considered one of their better development groups and too valuable to move on to 16-bit early whilst the market was small," says Anderson. "We did eventually move to 16-bit. Ian did a lot more work in 16-bit. The one game I did develop for Electronic Arts was loosely based on the movie *Inner Space*. Unfortunately, it got canned along with a host of other games that Electronic Arts opted not to publish in 1990."

SOFTOGRAPHY

In just three years, David Anderson and his Platinum Production colleagues worked on many Spectrum conversions

Brain Damage, Silversoft, Spectrum 1983
Colour Clash, Romik Software, Spectrum 1983
Exterminator, Romik Software, Spectrum 1983
Shark Attack, Romik Software, Spectrum 1983
Beach Head 1, US Gold, Spectrum 1984
Beach Head 2, US Gold, Spectrum 1984
Galactic Trooper, Romik Software, Spectrum... 1984
Lode Runner, Software Projects, Spectrum 1984
Lode Runner [New Game Set], Software Projects, Spectrum 1984
The Dam Busters, US Gold, Spectrum............... 1985
Raid Over Moscow, US Gold, Spectrum............ 1985
Rambo, Ocean Software, Spectrum,.................. 1985

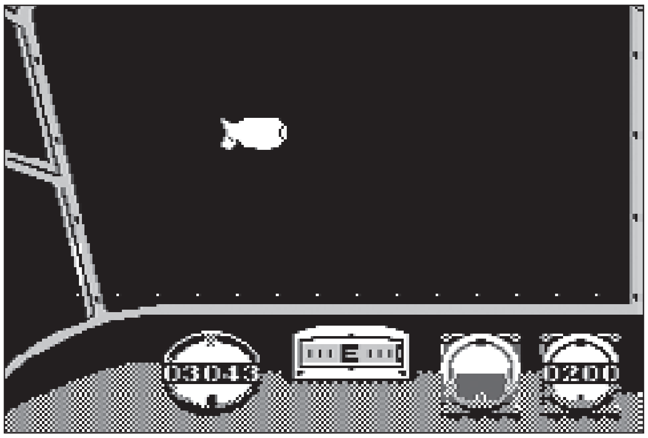


▲ *Rambo* created some headaches for Anderson as he tried to meet a Christmas deadline, but at least tiny 8-bit Sly Stallone was more convincing than the one in the movies.



DAVID ANDERSON

▼ *Dam Busters* let you have your very own Barnes Wallis moment in your living room.



killer on processor power because the programmer literally has to flip the bit on the speaker at the correct frequency of oscillation to make a musical note – it requires some very careful coding," explains Anderson.

Perhaps one of the most interesting titles Anderson worked on was *Rambo*. Unlike past games, *Rambo* was a collaborative project and Anderson found himself working with the likes of Paul Owens and Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith. For once, Anderson saw his graphics being canned, as Ocean felt that his original look wasn't cartoonish enough (the visuals were eventually supplied by Smith). Even with this small setback, Anderson and the rest of the team were never in any doubt as to what shape *Rambo* would eventually take. "The basic idea was to recreate the *Commando* arcade game concepts but set it in the plot of the actual movie," Anderson explains. "We actually re-used the source code from *Beach Head II* with some updates to make it faster and smoother. Then it was simply a case of developing the data for the objects and replacing the behavioural code. The whole process took us nine weeks."

Rambo also proved to be one of the team's toughest deadlines and with its Christmas deadline drawing ever closer, Platinum Productions was starting to feel the pressure. "Ocean had booked out production time at a tape duplication factory in Birmingham and I can remember having to fly to Manchester in early December to do some finishing touches on the code and then being driven to the factory by Paul Owens," recalls Anderson.

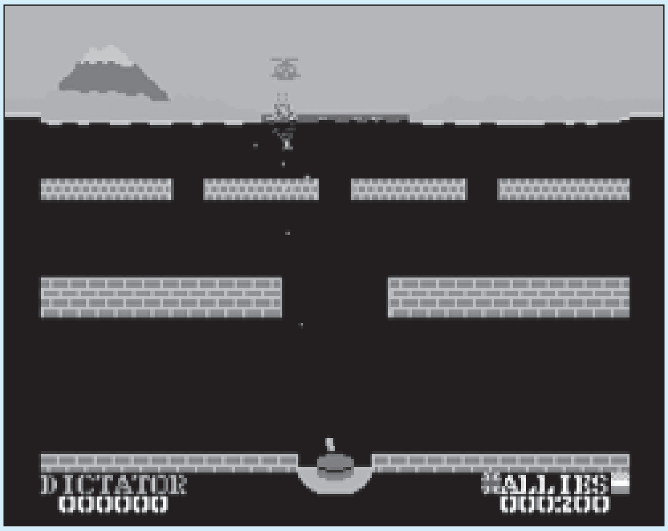
"The game had to be duplicated that day or it was going to miss the last shelf-stocking day before Christmas. Jon Woods was there and the whole factory was waiting for me to give them the master. Jon asked me just to play the whole game through and win it to demonstrate that it was all working and bug free. This was the most nerve-racking game of my life. One issue with many of my games was that there was no slack to code backdoors or cheats; I literally had to play it all the way through and win it before the tape duplication began. Luckily we made it in to the shops on time."

PLAYING THE FAME GAME

Rambo may have seemed like a massive licence for such a young development house, but with three Crash Smashes in a row it was obvious that Platinum Productions was something special. While the awards were more than justified, the fact that Platinum managed its own PR also helped. Anderson essentially became the front man of the team and was soon doing everything he could to ensure that everyone knew who Platinum Productions was.

"We worked directly with *Crash* magazine in terms of bringing to their attention that the same team had developed all three games," he recalls. "The publisher's PR people didn't really help us at all. I just don't think they were particularly aware of what was happening at the developer level. The market was so fast-moving in those days and so many titles were being published – it's not like

▼ Platinum Productions' conversions of the *Beach Head* titles led to prestigious licence-based work.



DECISIONS, DECISIONS...

With dozens of games behind him, a burnt-out Anderson temporarily left the games industry in the mid-Eighties in order to go to university. Upon his return, however, he found himself making a difficult decision that resulted in him leaving the industry for good. "I took a break and came back to it in 1989 developing a game for the Atari ST and Amiga. By this time I realised my real talent was in the technical side of gaming. My future could have been as a 3D graphics engine or physics engine specialist in a larger games house like Electronic Arts. In the early Nineties this would have meant moving to America to achieve it. It didn't really make sense for me, as I was ready to move on and do commercial products."

today where games cost millions of dollars and take one or more years to develop."

While the triple whammy of Crash Smashes were initially seen as business as usual, Anderson now realises just what an amazing achievement it actually was to earn such accolades. "It was only possible because of our high programming standards in terms of quality and re-usability," he explains. "As we weren't trained software engineers, code re-use was what we needed to be successful, to produce a new game every month."

DIFF'RENT STROKES

Even though they found great success with Platinum Productions, the friends (who were later joined by Robin Muir and Mark Craig) eventually parted ways when they all chose different career and education paths. Some went to university, others remained in the industry, though not necessarily for long. "I remember telling friends that I wanted to be in a less cyclical, less fickle market," Anderson recalls. "You could code a great 3D engine and be technically superior, but if the journalists didn't like the gameplay then you were sunk. The stakes were simply too big by 1990. Games were taking teams of six to 12 people one year to create, so I moved on to other things."

Anderson no longer works in the games industry – "I'm really out of touch with games nowadays, but what I see is an industry dominated by the Americans and Japanese and that the main European publishers seem to be foreign owned," he says. However, he does still works with computers, and is currently with Microsoft in Seattle. Although he's lost touch with the rest of Platinum Productions since leaving university, Anderson is still on good terms with Alan Laird. "We have a lot in common," he says. "We both have Japanese wives and bilingual children with two, or even three nationalities. I understand that Ian Morrison still works in the games business and is based in LA but I'm no longer in contact with him."

Despite his current success (he's considered a leader in his field of agile software development), Anderson still harbours fond memories of his time at Platinum and is delighted at the resurgence of retro gaming, even if he does feel that there are a lot of legal issues to be ironed out. "I know I have a stack of contract paperwork in my parents' attic which says all the rights in the code for the games I wrote reverted to me two years after the publisher ceased actively marketing them," he explains.

"I'd like to see old games distributed for free. I've no interest in making any money from them and I don't believe that the publishers have the right to be selling them without my permission. Something ought to be done about it but it's a lifetime away for me now and I'm not about to take a leadership position in fighting the battle."

So for now, Anderson is content with his memories, but one thing's for sure. "I'll still be in the software business for many years to come…" he says.

SOFTOGRAPHY CONT.



Tapper, US Gold, Spectrum 1985

World Series Baseball, Imagine Software, Spectrum 1985

World Series Basketball, Imagine Software, Spectrum 1985

Zaxxon, US Gold, Spectrum 1985

Kung-Fu Master, US Gold, Spectrum 1986

Super Soccer, Imagine Software Ltd, Spectrum 1986



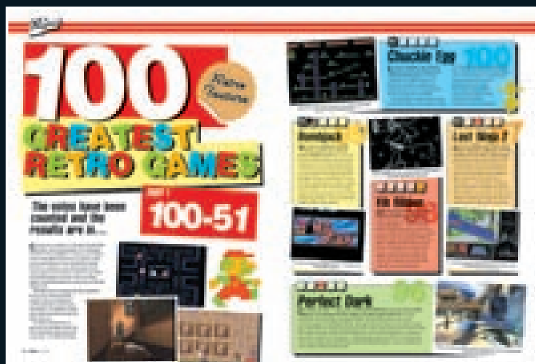
▲ *World Series Baseball* brought you all the action of the game without having to pay for warm beer and sit through the American national anthem. "Look! It's Enrico Pallazzo!"

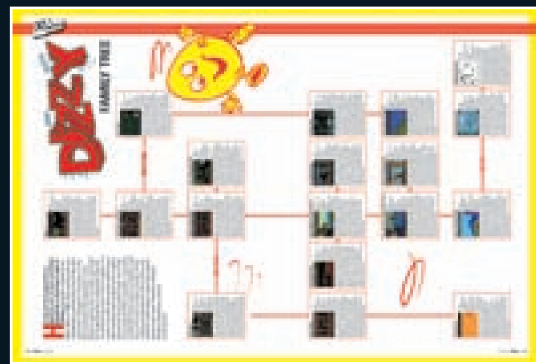

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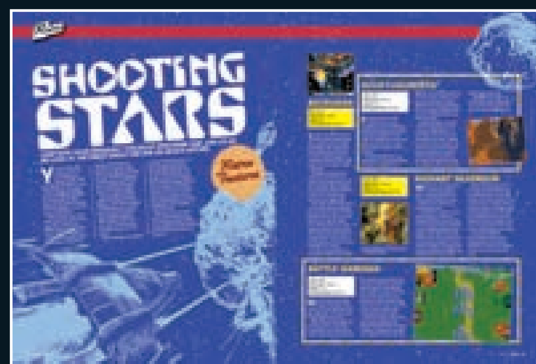
Prison slang's changed a lot since we were there **Magic Sword – Arcade [Capcom] 1990**

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